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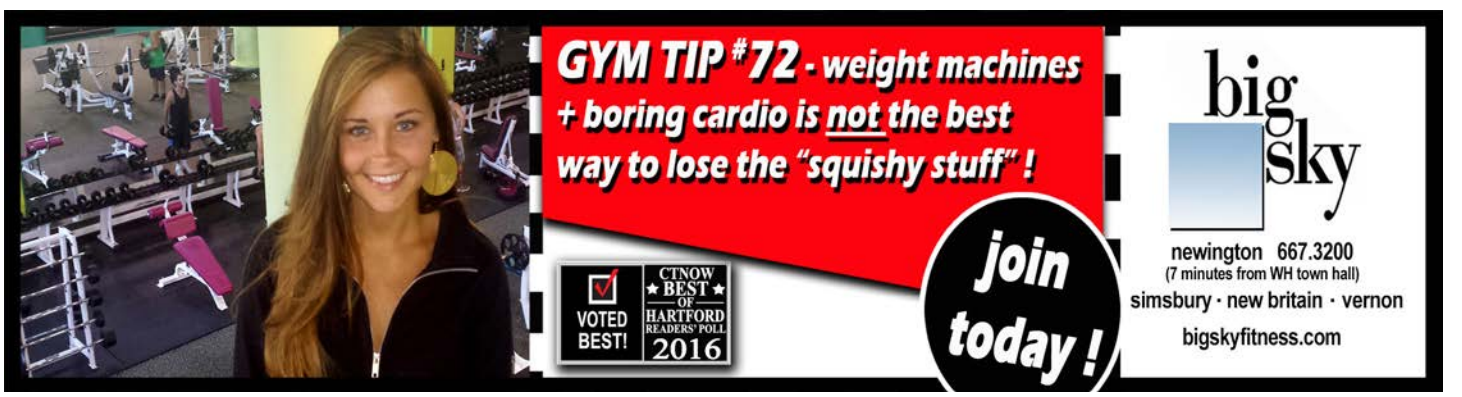
Beautifying Elmwood

Charlie Hilborn initiates new look

See story on page 22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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"The energy behind this is unbelievable. The people who want to help – I've never seen anything like this."

– Rev. Terry Schmidt

See story page 28

ON THE COVER

Charlie Hilborn worked with KNOX Inc. to beautify Elmwood, and the effort spread to other sections of town, including Bishops Corner and Park Road.

Photo by Lisa Brisson
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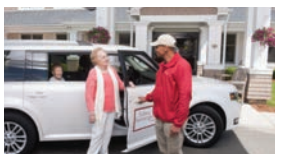

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Putting faith into action

St. Peter Claver has inspired social outreach from parishioners for 50 years

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Photos by Lynn Woike

The Rev. Robert Kwiatkowski, pastor, stands in front of St. Peter Claver Parish; the building's outline suggests a ship, a tribute to the slave ships its patron saint met each day.

On September 9, 1966, the growing Catholic population within St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in West Hartford prompted Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien to divide the parish and create St. Peter Claver Parish.

Fr. John Shugrue, the founding principal of St. Thomas Aquanas High School and the first principal of South Catholic High School in Hartford, was appointed the founding pastor. He was given a dowry from St. Thomas and charged with developing the 8 1/2-acre parcel on Pleasant Street.

It was he who encouraged the building of a stunningly contemporary church – devoid of chandeliers, murals, statuary and stained glass windows – focusing worshippers on the tabernacle.

Arrangements were made to use the auditorium of Braeburn School on Sundays and holy days. St. Thomas Seminary offered the services of a weekend assistant.

That first Sunday, the two priests greeted parishioners at the door. The next week, the first baptism was held; Mr. and Mrs. Philip Dunn baptized their son Peter Claver Dunn.

Coffee hours were held on every block in the parish – 38 in all – over the first few weeks.

"I thought it was exciting to be part of something new, to know that it had to be built literally from the ground up," said Carol Gourlie, a founding member of the parish.

"We are a very vibrant stewardship parish, offering our time, our talent and our treasure in the service of God and his people."

– Rev. Robert Kwiatkowski

Calling Shugrue "a very warm individual and well-respected priest," she praised his initial outreach, both with the block meetings where he listened to what people had to say, and by greeting parishioners as they arrived for Mass in the school's auditorium.

"That was a really wonderful thing to do. It was a great basis for starting the parish and getting a community together. He had to build the community as well as the physical plant. He was very masterful at ... gathering his flock."

That first year, Thanksgiving Mass was celebrated at Northwest Catholic High School. By December, the rectory – a large two-story brick house at 1105 Farmington Avenue – was purchased and redecorated, offering Shugrue a residence. There was also a chapel where daily Mass, confessions and baptisms could be held.

In 1967, every parishioner was personally contacted during a fundraising campaign that yielded pledges of $380,000 during two hours one Sunday; 95 percent of them would be fulfilled by the building's dedication. That year, 37 children received their First Communion and the church's crest was designed.

The commitment to follow in the footsteps of St. Peter Claver was evident from the beginning, as church documents indicate food and clothing donations were collected, and there was an outpouring of aid while working with

St. Peter Claver

Peter Claver was born of an impoverished family in Spain in the early 1580s. The promise he showed prompted the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) to help him get a classical and theological education. Although he excelled at his scholarly work, he was restless. He felt a strong call to dedicate his life to the spiritual ministration of the dispossessed in the West Indies, then a Spanish colony. In 1610, along with three other Jesuit companions, Peter Claver sailed in the galleon San Pedro for Cartegena, Colombia. The South American seaport was a terminus for ships that transported people from Africa to the new land where they were sold into slavery. When the ships arrived, they brought holds full of sick, injured and frightened people. These captured West Africans, as well as members of the local native tribes, became Claver's parishioners.

From 1615-1650, he lived to emulate Christ's example of love for the least of his brothers. He blessed the dead, baptized the dying and helped heal the sores of the survivors.

"Speak to them with your hands before you speak to them with your lips," was to become his motto. His mission was expressed in his signature: "slave of the slaves forever."

He lived an austere life in a barren cell, accepting donations to buy medicines, food and the freedom of some slaves to serve as interpreters. With their help, Claver taught the sold slaves about Christ, explaining that God saw their worth. Each year, he instructed, confessed and baptized 5,000 of the 10,000 slaves entering Cartagena.

His active ministry spanned more than 40 years, during which time he baptized 300,000 slaves.

Claver died September 8, 1654. He was canonized in 1888 with Pope Leo XIII proclaiming, "No life, except for the life of Christ has so moved me as that of St. Peter Claver."

His feast day is celebrated annually September 9.

Source: St. Peter Claver Catholic Church

Hartford churches.

In November, plans for the new church and parish center – designed by John Riley of the then West Hartford firm Russell, Gibson and vonDohlen – were presented. It was to be rustic and natural, to blend in with its surroundings.

Having the plans explained "helped people to accept it and embrace it," Gourlie said, recalling the night the plans were shared with parishioners. The symbolism was "pretty terrific and meaningful," she added.

An interfaith vacation Bible school was held in the summer of 1968.

Also that summer, groundbreaking ceremonies were held.

According to a church publication, "The William L. Mooneys, the last family to live where St. Peter Claver Church now stands, retained their gift of nature that was to be known as 'Mooney's Woods.' In 1953, Mrs. Beula E. Mooney gave this land, along with her beautiful gardens, to the town of West Hartford as a gift.

Photo courtesy of St. Peter Claver Parish

The new church was formally dedicated, May 3, 1970.

Part of this land was then sold for the building of St. Peter Claver."

In the spirit of full lay participation, a council was elected in the fall of 1968, and committees were formed to further liturgy, education, social action and financial planning.

Strikes delayed completion of the new church. The parish center was completed in the fall of 1969. Primarily wood and glass, it contains a large assembly room, an office, a kitchen and six classrooms that can double to become 12 with the use of sliding panels.

That Christmas Eve, midnight Mass was held in the nearly completed church, and 470 families had their new spiritual home.

What most of them didn't know at the time was that the heating system was not yet working automatically, Riley said. The building superintendent was in the mechanical room and the building contractor was signaling him from the back row of the church when to turn the heat up or down.

On May 3, 1970, an over-capacity crowd gathered for the formal dedication of the completed church and parish center.

The church's contemporary design reflected the many innovations of Vatican II, meant to implement the new liturgy. Pews were spread out in a fan shape with no visual obstructions; no altar rail separated the congregation from the clergy; and the organ and choir were on the main floor and not separated from worshipers by being placed in a balcony. A 400-pound modern crucifix – depicting Jesus looking up, envisioning the resurrection – is suspended from the ceiling. The same sculptor, Arthur Mullen, carved the life-size statue of St. Peter Claver outside the entrance.

Virginia Floryan of West Hartford carved the dark walnut

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The rustic interior of stone and wood has only two large stained glass windows. The altar, the pulpit, the baptismal font and the priest's chair are all made of Italian marble. Red carpet originally covered the floor.

Calling him "a wonderful client," Riley recalled Shugrue working closely with him to design the church. Its outline suggests a ship, a tribute to the ones its patron saint met each day.

Shugrue wanted something "very simple" to keep with St. Peter Claver's humbleness and his work, Riley said.

Together, he and Shugrue solved the problem of spanning the space without the use of columns, settling on the large wooden trusses. The dark beams connected with massive steel plates and exposed bolts are reminisent of the hold of a slave ship.

That brought the whole plan together, Riley said.

Photo by Lynn Woike

Ten years ago, the church was renovated and a chapel was added behind the altar. It features stained glass suggesting the water on which the slave ships traveled and St. Peter Claver's motto: "Speak to them with your hands before you speak to them with your lips."

Above the trusses are nine skylights.

Riley recalled that the mason subcontractor brought his uncles, who were skilled stonemasons, out of retirement to construct the walls from 360 tons of fieldstone taken from the boundary walls of an old farmhouse in Hebron.

"I've done many churches over the years," Riley, who is retired and living in New York, said. "I think this was the best work that I've done."

The church's simplicity offers little to distract parishioners from their dedication to human dignity, civil rights and social justice as they provide care for the needy, following the example of St. Peter Claver, the apostle to the slaves.

Outreach projects through the years have included giving Christmas gifts and meals, a Thanksgiving food drive, the adoption of two Asian refugee families, drives for school supplies and home-ownership for low-income families who applied sweat equity to renovations of deteriorating houses.

"The whole sense of social outreach has been going on consistantly and continues to this very day," said the Rev. Robert Kwiatkowski, who became the parish's fourth pastor last November.

Parishioner Dut Tong, one of the Lost Boys of the Sudan, had a deep desire to help his village in southern Sudan.

"A few years ago, we did a big collection and helped him to build a well in their village, and we have plans to help them build a school building," pastoral associate Gigi Frailey said.

"There's been a major outreach to the people in Haiti, too, here in the parish," Kwiatkowski said.

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Present
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Massive, dark wooden beams connected with massive steel plates and exposed bolts suggesting the hold of a slave ship frame nine skylights.

Photo by Lynn Woike

"Our ministry in Haiti started with one of our parishioners going down there and making some contacts and doing a lot of collections [for personal care items]," Frailey said. "It's grown and grown, and we were responsible for helping them to obtain a mobile medical unit, so it's Haitians helping Haitians now.

"Some of the doctors who belong to our parish have gone down over the years. Like every year, for a long time, we would send somebody to Haiti with a mission to help."

A Walk for Haiti involving many organizations starts and ends at the church every year.

A Knights of Columbus council at the church is active, supporting numerous charitable and social events for the community and the parish.

Church seal

The lion that occupies the top third of the shield is taken from the coat of arms of Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien, the founder of the parish of St. Peter Claver. It signifies the authority and chain of command of the Catholic church. The half moon stands for the name of a street – Calle de la Media Luna – on which Peter Claver begged for food and medicine as he made his way toward the slave ships anchored in the harbor.

To the right of the crescent moon are iron shackles that locked the left leg of one slave to the right leg of another.

The interlocking rings represent Christian marriage and the dome at the top is that of West Hartford Town Hall.

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In addition to social outreach there have been in-house social gatherings through the 50 years: coffee doughnut socials, a men's softball team, St. Patrick's Day events, receptions, family picnics and potlucks, and celebrations.

An open house in January 1977 marked the completion of the 5,000-square-foot rectory on church grounds.

A year's worth of activities commemorated the church's silver anniversary, including a festival on the church grounds, a return to Braeburn School for a Mass of Recollection and a formal ball. Each parish family was presented with a book about the church.

Ten years ago, an extensive restoration and renovation of the church was undertaken in conjunction with the 40th anniversary.

With respect to the original design concepts, the new design incorporated two colors of Italian tile flooring to complement the fieldstone, new oak pews, a refurbished baptismal font with flowing water into an immersion pool moved just inside the doors of the church, a permanent choir space with new Dobson pipe organ, and enhanced lighting.

A Blessed Sacrament Chapel was created by bumping out the wall behind the altar. Its stained glass windows symbolize the flowing waters on which the slave ships traveled. St. Peter Claver's words serve as a reminder of the parish's call to service: "Speak to them with your hands before you speak to them with your lips."

This year, to mark its 50th anniversary, Archbishop Leonard Blair will preside over a special Mass Sunday, October 30 at 10:30 a.m. All the priests who have served at the church have been invited to return and celebrate as well, said Evelyn Benoit, who is helping coordinate the event.

The Knights of Columbus honor guard will be part of the procession, she said. Afterwards will be a lavish reception.

An event for parishioners is also planned for another date.

When the parish started, there were 450 families. At the 10th anniversary, there were 700 families.

"Right now we're around 1,000 families," Kwiatkowski said. "The first thing that touched me was how welcoming this parish is, not just to me, which they were, but I noticed it with other people joining the parish, people walking in, the greeters at the doors. People who had recently joined the parish came to me and told me that they also had never felt so welcomed in a parish. It's one of the gifts here.

"We are a very vibrant stewardship parish, offering our time, our talent and our treasure in the service of God and his people. ... We have at least 35 ministries for lay people in the parish to take part."

For 50 years, the parish has been "a very welcoming ... community of prayerful people and faith-filled people who gather for worship and prayer, and to support one another within the parish ... then turn that into outreach into the larger community beyond the parish," Gourlie said. "There's been a great many different things done, ... all kinds of works of mercy. ... The generosity is beyond belief." **WHL**

Photo courtesy of St. Peter Claver Parish

In 1968, a teenage folk group brought a youthful exuberance to Mass at Braeburn School.

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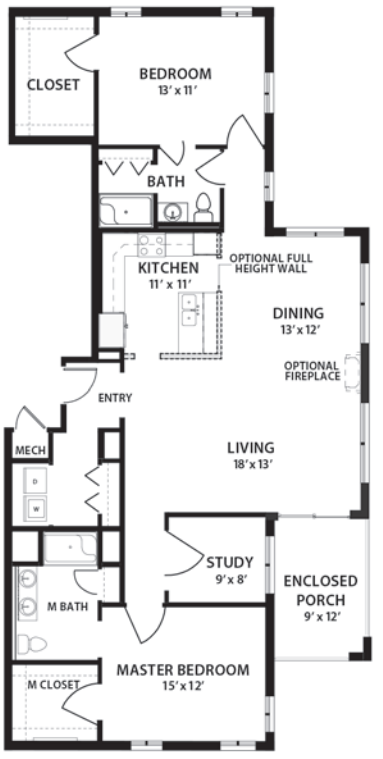

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Photos by Abigail Albair

Above, firefighter/paramedic Amanda Winn's gear hangs in the firetruck while she rides an ambulance with a patient to Hartford Hospital. She is pictured right arriving on the scene of a medical call with her paramedic gear. Now that the town's fire department also provides paramedic service, 17 firefighters currently serve in the dual role.

New role, same mission

Firefighters take on paramedic work as part of ongoing committment to public service

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

The tones sound in one of the town's firehouses and a crew of four boards their truck, gear in tow.

They aren't headed to a fire this time, but they will still potentially save a life.

When the truck parks at its destination, one of the four jumps out carrying 60 pounds of gear: a backpack filled with medical supplies and a cardiac monitor.

The other three accompany the firefighter/paramedic as he or she provides care to a patient in need.

After months of preparation, the town's fire department officially assumed the responsibility of paramedic service at the beginning of August.

Three first responders: police, fire and ambulance, now deploy to every medical call made in town to the Emergency Reporting Center.

If transport to an area hospital is required, the paramedic boards an American Medical Response ambulance along with the patient and stays with the person to administer advanced life support.

In the past, paramedic service for the town was provided by American Medical Response, which deployed an additional

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paramedic vehicle to every call.

The Town Council approved a resolution last September to allow the town to begin providing paramedic service in-house, and accepted a grant to cover initial equipment costs to implement the program.

Such equipment included dispatch software, medical devices and personal protective equipment, for which the town was awarded a U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters grant.

The fire department currently has 16 paramedics working out of three of the town's five stations: Station 2 in West Hartford Center, Station 4 on Albany Avenue and Station 5 on Berkshire Road.

Twelve of those paramedics are fully credentialed, explained Lt. Jarrad Smith who is the department's acting Emergency Medical Services officer.

Smith began a six-month detail when the paramedic service launched to provide clinical oversight of the program, ensuring operations are consistent with Hartford Hospital standards.

The hospital is the sponsoring hospital of West Hartford's paramedic program.

Preparing to provide the service was a unique challenge, Smith said, as West Hartford did not have a current program through which to credential its already trained and licensed paramedics.

"How do you take paramedics, all with varying backgrounds, and develop a process to credential them to make sure they're prepared?" he posed. "There was previously no mechanism to do that."

All the existing fire department advanced life support systems in Connecticut were established in the 1970s and '80s, so there was little institutional knowledge available to West Hartford as to how such a transition to the dual role should be made.

"We had to reinvent the ways," explained Capt. Keith Byrne, who heads to department's training division. "We had to build the playbook as we were going along."

West Hartford firefighter/paramedics rode with other town's department's to obtain credentials and two additional paramedics are currently doing so with Manchester Fire and Rescue.

By definition, a paramedic is the highest level of EMT Emergency Medical Technician certification. A paramedic is trained and certified to perform advanced life support, which includes administering IV fluids, injections, medications and performing advanced respiratory procedures.

There were different requirements for firefighter/paramedics to obtain credentials based on previous experience, Byrne explained.

Six of the group were experienced Hartford region paramedics who needed to go on 10 "critical" calls – known as advanced life support calls – and be assessed by a seasoned paramedic who confirmed their skills and knowledge were up to par.

Those who had greater than a year of experience as a paramedic within the state of Connecticut were required to ride on 30 ALS calls, and those with less than a year of experience or with experience outside the state, had to ride on 50 calls.

Three classes of new recruits joined the fire department in 2015, all of which consisted of firefighter/paramedics.

Smith is also a credentialed paramedic, the first one of a higher rank in the department.

Firefighter/paramedics have to be able to switch hats with ease and operate independently making medical decisions as well as work as part of a unit on fire calls.

"It's a dual role and they're both equally important," Byrne said. "They have to have the skills and knowledge on both sides and that is not an easy thing to be that diverse. They can be running into a structure fire pulling out a victim and the next thing you know they're trying to keep them alive on the way to the hospital. You have to think outside of the box and switch rolls quickly."

A large piece of the department training for the firefighter/paramedics was orienting them to the range of medical equipment they carry.

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Narcan to treat a drug overdose to Benadryl to treat an allergic reaction. They carry equipment to aid in airway management, such as a video laryngoscope which helps the paramedic successful intubate a patient with precision to avoid soft tissue or vocal chord damage.

All of them had to pass a written exam, and each is required to do 36 hours of continuing medical education yearly and regular certification renewals.

Each spent four hours in one-on-one clinical training with a sponsoring physician.

On scene

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, Rocco Laudato, a paramedic/firefighter out of Station 4, rode on his fourth medical call and second transport of the day when he treated a patient for a potential cardiac event.

Immediately once he arrived on scene he began running an EKG on the patient.

Quick response time to cardiac events is something Smith is monitoring closely.

While response time was always previously tracked, Smith is most excited about the opportunity to now track clinical data, such as how quickly a paramedic recognizes a condition like a heart attack, begins administering advanced life support and works with the hospital to continue treatment.

"That's an intangible pro of bringing the service in-house," he said.

Two weeks into the program, data showed that paramedics arrived on scene within 4.56 minutes of call origination and paramedics were reading the EKG of those having cardiac symptoms within 6.73 minutes of arrival. That information can be transported to the hospital if a life-threatening incident is recognized.

In the case of an ST-elevation myocardial infarction – a serious cardiac event known as a STEMI – the goal is to have no more than 90 minutes elapse between the 911 call to the time the patient is on the operating table. This is the national standard of what provides the best chance for the patient to make a full recovery.

"We want to be on par with or exceeding the national standard," Smith said. "Cardiac, stroke and trauma: those are the three main critical areas where we know if a paramedic makes an early diagnosis and early transport [the patient] has the best chance for a positive longterm outcome."

During his assessment, Laudato was cool and collected.

"You can have two reports of chest pain in a row and still have them each be a different situation," he said. "You have to play every call as an unknown until you arrive. Any older person complaining about pain above the waist is [in my mind] in a cardiac incident until I figure something else out."

The paramedic/firefighters file reports on all calls using an iPad on a iCloud based HIPPA complaint patient care reporting system.

Although there have been some kinks to be worked out since the roll out, the transition has largely been a smooth one, paramedic/firefighter Amanda Winn said.

Winn, who works out of station 5, was previously a paramedic with AMR. Since the paramedic service launched in West Hartford, she has gone on calls for everything from a diabetic emergency to a basic fall.

"It's definitely very busy," she said. "I like being busy. I like being out in the town and helping residents in any way I can. Fire prevention is so good these days we don't go to the fires we used to, so this is a step in the right direction for the department."

The dual role is perfect for Winn, who has always had an interest in both areas of emergency service.

"Since I was little I always knew I wanted to be a firefighter," she said. "As I got older, I became interested in EMS, so I went to college and medic school."

On a recent Saturday morning, the truck from Station 5 rolled to a medical call for an elderly patient complaining of dizziness. Once on scene, Winn quickly assessed the patient, administered an EKG and boarded an ambulance to Hartford Hospital with the patient to continue care.

"It's almost like two separate jobs," she said of being a firefighter/paramedic just before she was dispatched to the call. "You can have a car fire and go back to your

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Joseph Mangione drives the truck from Station 5 to the scene of a medical call. All four firefighters staffing a station at a time deploy to a medical call with the station's firefighter/paramedic.

firefighter brain, and when you're on a medical call that's also second nature."

As of August 22, firefighter/paramedics responded to 342 calls, Smith said, and rode with 203 patients to area hospitals.

The three main calls received were for traumatic injury, chest pain and altered level of consciousness. Other calls ranged from abdominal pain, diabetic incidents and allergic reactions to stroke and psychiatric emergencies.

When the change in service was made, Director of Financial Services Peter Privitera outlined the financial benefits of implementing the paramedic program, while Fire Chief Gary Allyn stressed the benefits to public safety the change would have.

The town's previous contract with AMR for all ALS calls for service cost an annual amount of approximately $315,000. In addition to saving that amount by providing the service in-house, Privitera estimated that an additional $188,000 in revenue will be generated for the town through billing for in-house paramedic services.

"The change means more efficient service with a larger group of trained professionals available seven days a week, 24 hours a day," Chief Allyn said.

Training to provide the service began more than a year ago.

"To be assigned the advanced life support for a community is a significant amount of responsibility," Smith said. "The town made a commitment to invest in this program and we as a Fire Department made a commitment to make this a success." **WHL**

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A mind for municipal law

Pat Alair moves into corporation counsel role

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

Great lawyers work in the background.

At least, that is, great lawyers for municipal entities, as far as Patrick Alair is concerned.

Alair was named the town's corporation counsel at the end of July. The Town Council appointed him to complete the term of retiring Joseph O'Brien.

O'Brien, a former West Hartford Town Council member and deputy mayor, was the town's longest serving corporation counsel and remembers when Alair first joined the counsel staff 30 years ago.

"He has helped me so much [during my time as corporation counsel] I can't even begin to describe it," O'Brien said.

Although Alair, who was in the role of deputy corporation counsel, was preparing to retire himself in August, he said the offer to take on the new challenge was an honor and one he couldn't pass up.

"I'm looking forward to continuing working for the town," he said. "I would have missed it otherwise."

Alair was still required to retire from his deputy position with the town in order to assume the corporation counsel role. The town's corporation counsel maintains an attorney-client relationship with the town, meaning the position is that of an independent contractor. As a contractor, Alair is not required to maintain office hours or work a set number of hours, but rather he determines his own schedule while ensuring all matters of the counsel officer are being appropriately handled.

Compensation for the role is $42,500 annually. His term will expire December 21, 2017, but he will continue to serve after that date until a new corporation counsel is named. He could also be appointed to subsequent terms.

Kimberly Boneham, who was most recently the town's assistant corporation counsel, has moved into the deputy slot, while new hire Garmon Newsom II has taken on the assistant role.

Alair is now settling into leading the team and adjusting to his new position.

"So far it's been fairly quiet, no big crisis so it's going pretty smoothly so far," he said after just a few weeks on the job. "I'm still in transition. All of the stuff that needed to be monitored closely has been distributed to Kimberly and Garmon. I'm here [in West Hartford]. So, I can be here even though physically I'm not here, which is a nice feeling, and we have two great attorneys working for the town, so all is going well."

Alair grew up in Canada, attended the University of Ottawa and subsequently began law school before he and his wife were married and he relocated to West Hartford. His stay in town was initially brief, as the couple relocated to Springfield for three years to attend Western New England University to complete their law degrees.

They then came back to town where they have lived since, raising their family.

His two daughters are products of the West Hartford public school system. His family has now expanded to include two sons-in-law, a grandson born in April of this year and another grandchild on the way.

Though he has many years in service to the town behind

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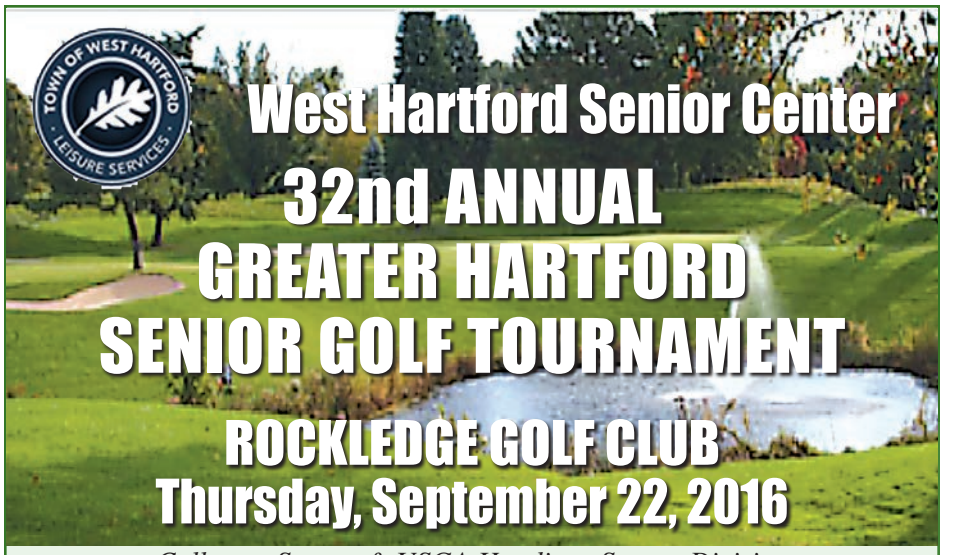

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him, the once philosophy major never anticipated his career path would lead him to so many decades in municipal law. He's overseen a wide variety of legal matters through the years, from changes to town ordinances to lawsuits.

Mayor Shari Cantor called Alair a "Renaissance man" when he was appointed to his new position, and thanked him for his knowledge, expertise and humor.

"You are an institution and you have really made us stellar in the eyes of our peers," she said. "You know your business and your work and you have an incredible depth of experience."

West Hartford LIFE caught up with Alair to ask him a few questions to gain more insight into who he is both professionally and outside of the office.

Q: You've had many successful years in the corporation counsel office in town but were preparing to retire fully. What was it about the job that drew you in to take on the new endeavor?

A: It certainly wasn't something I expected, but when this opportunity came up, I didn't even think twice about it. After 30 years, I knew that just walking away was going to be a very hard thing to do. I still live in this town. I have loved my work here and the people I work with. The chance to stay involved and ease into retirement seemed like the proverbial no-brainer.

Q: You've worked with Joe for many years. What new perspective do you hope to bring to the job and how do you think you'll be influenced by the time spent with your predecessor?

A: I'm not sure how much "new" perspective I'll bring. After nearly 15 years of working together, I know we think a lot alike. I hope that what I can offer is the same level of experience he had and a continuation of his thoughtful, measured analysis of the legal issues facing the town.

Q: What doesn't the average resident realize about the job of corporation counsel?

A: People might be surprised to learn that there are only two full-time attorneys and one administrator in our office. For a town of our size and complexity, we run a pretty lean organization. I also think a few people may have the misimpression that we are here to be lawyers for the town's residents. We've been asked to draft wills for people and provide private legal advice on a number of occasions. We do try to point people in the right direction for legal advice when we can, but we are actually the attorneys for the town's government. As the name implies, we are the counsel for the municipal "corporation," which is the town of West Hartford.

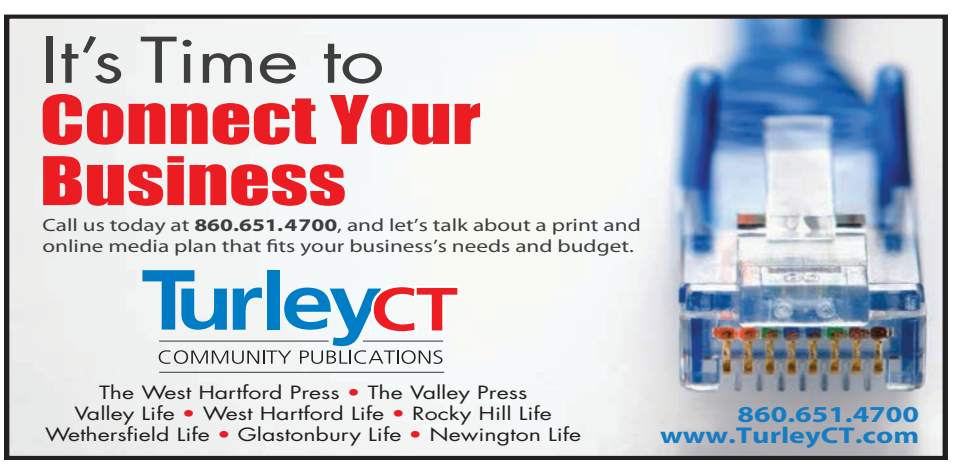
Q: What do you consider the most challenging part of the job and what part is the most fun for you?

A: The most challenging part of this job is being ready to understand entirely new subjects at a moment's notice. This job sits at the intersection of law and public policy. We wrestle with the same cultural and societal issues our country faces, but we do it at a very personal level. At one point or another we've done everything from admiralty law to zoning and we've touched just about every hot-button issue there is along the way. It definitely does prevent the job from getting boring.

For me, the most enjoyable part of the job is when I get to collaborate with others on something that goes beyond pure legal work. Working on projects like Blue Back Square or the Delamar Hotel, which involve architecture, engineering, environmental, planning and other areas of expertise is really a lot of fun.

Q: Corporation counsel requires a vast legal knowledge. You've tended to focus on ordinances in past work for the town. What is it about this area that made you choose it to focus your expertise?

A: Drafting ordinances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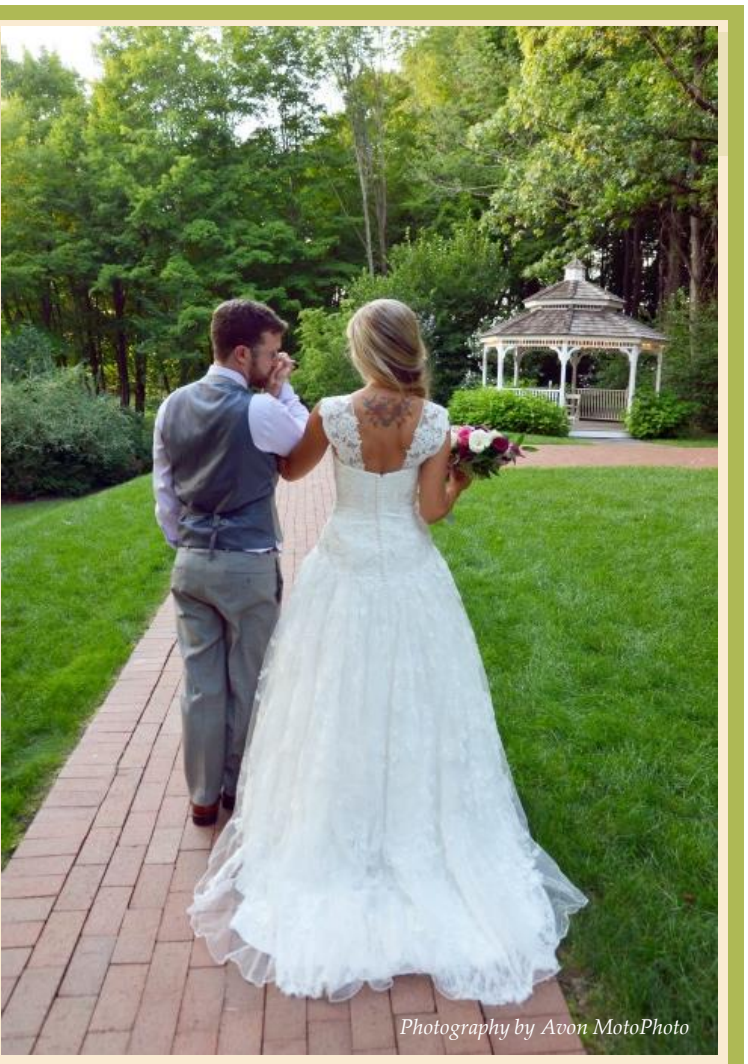

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Photo by Abigail Albair

Patrick Alair has worked in the town's counsel office for 30 years. He recently retired from his position as deputy corporation counsel to take on the contracted position of corporation counsel and continue his work for West Hartford in a different capacity.

is just a part of the job that has to get done. It's a bit more visible to the public because of the public hearing process, but it's really only a part of what we do. I think I drafted my first ordinance about two weeks into my time here and I've been doing it ever since.

Writing ordinances almost always involves the kind of collaboration with others that I find to be the most entertaining aspect of the job. After we identify an issue that needs to be resolved, town staff spends a lot of time chewing over exactly how a change to our ordinances should work for the people who are implementing it and for the people who are obliged to comply with it. We don't always get it perfect, but it's an iterative process and I think we do it very well.

Q: Anyone who has watched a Town Council meeting knows you bring a bit of quick wit to your presentations. Is stand up comedy a hobby of yours? We ask this jokingly, of course, but in seriousness, what are some hobbies you enjoy outside of the office?

A: No, stand-up is definitely not a hobby. I just can't help myself sometimes. Outside of work, I love to cook, brew beer and travel with my family. We just got back from a week in Iceland where four generations of our family had the chance to meet with a couple of relatives. We even visited the farm from which my great-grandmother emigrated in 1890. We had a huge family feast the night before we left to celebrate my retirement. I spent months planning it around a special bottle of wine my daughter and son-in-law bought for me. Then

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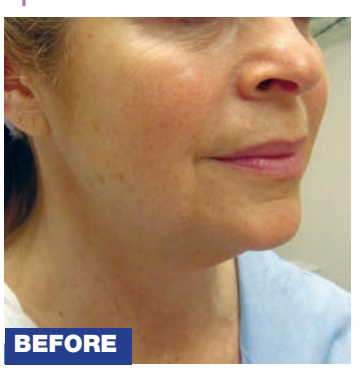

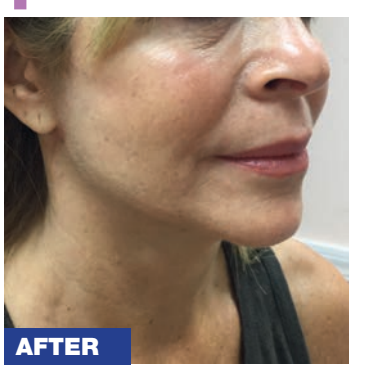

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she became pregnant so we set that bottle aside for another time, but had the rest of the dinner anyway. I brewed a couple of batches of beer, which went down pretty well that evening. Now that I have one grandson, Colin, and another on the way, I'm also looking forward to being a doting grandpa.

Q: What has been the greatest accomplishment of your career so far and what has been the biggest failure? How have these influenced you?

A: I hesitate to call anything an "accomplishment" on my part because so much of my job is built on the work of others. Certainly, Blue Back Square is the most transformative project I've worked on, but I was just one of many people involved in seeing that project through to completion. I don't think Blue Back would have happened if it had not been for many other, smaller things we did over the years to make people take notice of West Hartford. It's those little everyday changes that really matter over time and it's hard to point to any one of them.

As for the failures, let's just say I've learned that I rarely regret over-thinking something, but I've occasionally regretted under-thinking things.

Q: What do you hope your legacy will be as corporation counsel for the town?

A: That 50 years from now, no one will have any idea I was here. Lawyers should be invisible. You rarely read quotes from lawyers in the newspapers when things are going well. The best legacy I could leave is a remarkably unremarkable tenure in which everything appears to have gone smoothly and quietly.

Q: When you were studying law, was corporation counsel for a town or city something you envisioned doing? What drew you to this particular area as a career? What made you choose law to begin with?

A: I never imagined that I would end up working in municipal law. Like so many of the best things in life, it was just a fortuitous opportunity. It combined a number of areas of the law that had interested me during school in a way that I never expected to find. I always gravitated toward writing. I was a philosophy major as an undergrad student. I still think that the most valuable course I ever took was symbolic logic. Law school seemed like a natural extension of that kind of analytical process. At the time, getting out of law school and actually practicing law seemed like it was a long way off. I didn't really know what I would end up doing, but I was pretty sure it would be more profitable than philosophy.

"The best legacy I could leave is a remarkably unremarkable tenure in which everything appears to have gone smoothly and quietly."

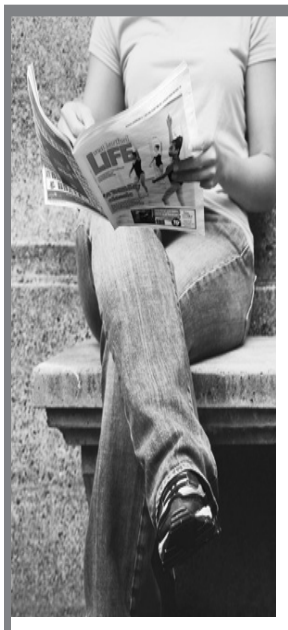
–Patrick Alair

Q: Many of the world's greatest historical minds had a law background. If you could have dinner with one such person, who would it be? Or would it be someone outside of the field and if so, who?

A: Well, if we're talking dinner, I'd have to go with Jacques Pepin. He's nearby and the guy can cook. I read his autobiography a few years ago and I'd love to spend an afternoon in the kitchen with him preparing dinner, talking about his life and watching his technique.

Jacques, if you're reading this, call me. I mean it. Seriously.

If we're talking about sitting with someone and carrying on a conversation, as trite as it might be, I'd have to say Abraham Lincoln. I've been re-watching Ken Burns' series "The Civil War" and I have so many questions I'd love to ask him if I could. Mostly, I'd love to know how he managed to sum up the entire war so brilliantly in 272 words at Gettysburg when I can't summarize an ordinance amending the Special Development District process in under a thousand. **WHL**



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Nest Studio owner Erica Moses stands with some of her creations in her home studio.

Photos by Alison Jalbert

Bereavement brings beauty

Teacher celebrates fifth anniversary of Nest Studios

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

As Nest Studio marks its fifth anniversary in 2016, owner Erica Moses sees it not only as a celebration of her business' success, but also as proof that it's possible to overcome something difficult.

The pillows in her home studio are created from textiles from around the world that boast vibrant colors and patterns, a testament to the fact that something happy can come out of a sad time. She began the business in 2011 after the death of her husband.

"I found the need to find something to occupy my mind and keep me well, keep me going," she said. "I had my full-time job – I'm a third grade teacher in town [at Norfeldt Elementary School] – but I needed to come home and have something at home."

She sought something she could do at home to fill the nights and help her heal from her grief.

Moses' youngest son was 5 at the time, which forced her to be realistic, given her situation.

"I knew I couldn't go somewhere else. I decided to create a home studio where my husband's office used to be," she said. "I transformed what

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Erica Moses uses remnants from the fabric to create accessories such as phone holders and key chains.

The kangas Erica grew up using in Rio de Janeirro are now used in her pillows.

Photos by Alison Jalbert

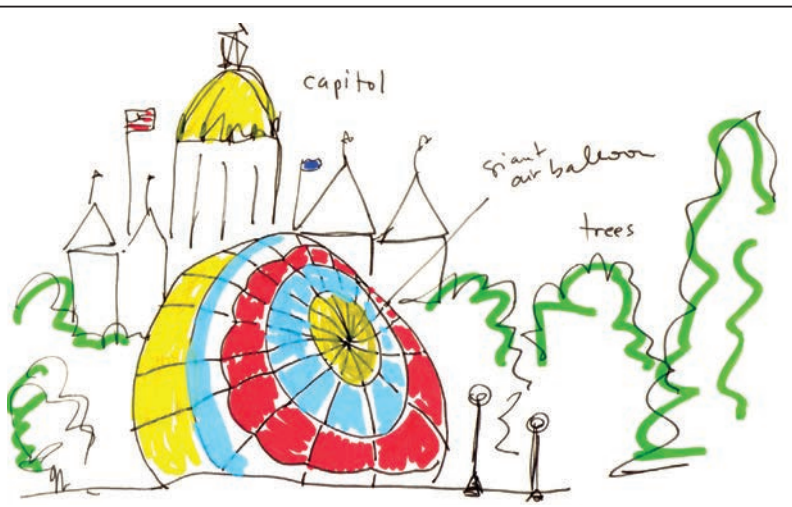
was a very sad room into a happy space [where] I can relax after school and create something that would make me and others happy."

Her work history and heritage helped her realize she wanted to work with textiles. Moses was born in Rio de Janeiro, where the girls on Ipanema Beach wrap themselves in kangas – large, brightly colored pieces of fabric. Growing up, she bought them not only to use at the beach in lieu of a towel, but at home she used them as bedspreads, curtains and as a way to cover pillows.

"I grew up surrounded by these kangas," she said. "I found great beauty in them. The colors and patterns are very bold. I was very attracted to them, not knowing 30 years later, I'd be buying them to bring back to the U.S. to make pillows."

Prior to becoming a teacher, Moses owned two stores in West Hartford Center: Italian clothing store Benetton in the 1980s and New Frontier, a Southwestern-themed lifestyle store, in the 1990s.

"I knew sales and I loved textiles. I just put everything together,"



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Photos by Alison Jalbert

Erica Moses travels the world to find unique and colorful textiles, which she then turns into pillows.

she said.

The business name came from the idea that a nest is a home. Moses said she knew she wanted to create something at home for the home, and said Nest Studios "just spoke to me."

"I also felt very much like a mother bird at the time. When you lose someone you love, you become overly protective of your little bird," she said of her youngest son. "I knew he was also in pain. I wanted to create a business that would embrace him as well. Nesting is part of the grieving process. I was creating something homey."

Nest Studio launched at a party Moses threw at her house, inviting all of her friends. Some of them didn't know she was making pillows.

Because of her schedule as a teacher, she has the opportunity to travel several weeks out of the year to purchase the textiles she uses to create her pillows.

"I fill my suitcase with textiles. Some women buy pocketbooks, shoes or jewelry – I buy textiles," she said with a laugh.

This year, she has gone to Venice, Portugal and Brazil. Once she returns home with her purchases, she studies the fabric, deciding how many pillows she wants to get from each cloth and where she wants them to be in regard to pattern and design.

"I may waste an incredible amount of cloth, but I won't compromise on the design of the pillow," Moses said.

While she cuts the fabric, there are two seamstresses who work for her to sew the pillows. She hired them from the Senior Job Bank because she believes in hiring local people.

"The fabric itself is not local, but I do hire my help locally," she said.

Shelley Mendoza, a longtime customer of Moses, first heard about Nest Studios when she was invited to a trunk show several years ago. She said she was in awe of Moses' studio space and unique items.

"I immediately fell in love with the gorgeous fabrics, colors and textures of her pillows," she wrote in an email to West Hartford LIFE. "But then, as she explained each and every fabric, telling the stories of where she had traveled to get it, why she fell in love with it and how she envisioned it would look as a pillow, how could I not buy one or two or three?"

Mendoza said she is unsure as to how many Nest Studios pillows she's bought; they are all over her home, and she has purchased some as gifts. She likes them because they are unique and eye-catching.

"[T]hey are expertly handmade, sold by a local artisan who clearly loves what she does, and I know I won't find them anywhere else," she said. "Add in the fact that all of the pillows I have purchased over the years are beautiful, and have withstood washings and whatever else my family has thrown at them."

Currently, Nest Studios is just "pillow parties" at friends' houses,

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"I want them, especially the girls, to feel empowered that they can make choices, be creative, have their own business, have fun and do multiple things."

–Erica Moses

her home or at craft fairs, such as the one associated with Celebrate! West Hartford. Moses also sells her products online, and has a vision for the business' future.

"My vision includes stuff like pop-up stores in existing cafes. I eventually want to buy a small truck and make a little pop-up store," she said. "I think that's a very trendy opportunity, a very uncommon opportunity, for those who don't want to be tied down in one space."

When she retires from teaching, she envisions opening an actual store in West Hartford, where she will sell not only her pillows, but also other items made from her hand-chosen textiles, such as clothing or tablecloths. She sees the store having a casual feel with a café inside, offering shoppers "accessible luxury." Moses said she believes stores in the Center close because their products are too expensive.

"What I want to offer is a store that has luxury items that don't break the bank," she said.

Many of Moses' friends ask when she finds time to make the pillows – she gets up at 5 a.m. every morning and works for an hour before getting ready for school. After work, she is in her studio for an hour while dinner is cooking.

"I've heard from other people, other women, that I have inspired other widows and other women who have had great losses in their lives to tap into their resources and find something they like and never had the chance to do – they reinvent themselves and create something to make them happy, but is realistic to their current situation and where they are in their lives."

Nest Studio has brought her joy in that aspect, as it has allowed her to be creative and make something for others to enjoy.

"In the process of doing that, all of a sudden three years, four years have gone by and I've created something that is my own and proved to my three children that I can stand on my own two feet, even after a great loss," she said.

She believes she is an inspiration to her students as well; Nest Studio pillows are present in her classroom, she gives them as gifts and invites her students to pillow parties. Moses shares her story with her students because she wants them to know it's possible to choose a profession and still be able to do something else.

Photos by Alison Jalbert

Erica Moses cuts the fabric for Nest Studio pillows and has two seamstresses who sew them.

"I want them, especially the girls, to feel empowered that they can make choices, be creative, have their own business, have fun and do multiple things," she said. "I think in today's society, you feel like you have to choose one thing."

Mendoza said it is evident that Moses has passion for everything she does.

"It shows in her work, in her business and her style," she said. "She welcomes you into her studio and makes you feel at home."

In reflecting on five years of Nest Studios, Moses said she feels like she's accomplishing something "really wonderful" that makes her and other people happy.

"Five years is just long enough to know you can make it," she said. "It is possible, after you fall, to pick yourself up and create something. When life gives you something hard, you have a choice. You can get in the fetal position and just stay there, or you can help yourself and get up again. Do something for yourself and for others. The underlying message to [my] children is you can overcome and still build something beautiful after a loss." **WHL**

For more information on Nest Studios, visit neststudiopillows.com or email ericamoses.nest@gmail.com.

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LIFE welcomes letters to the editor from our readers. Letters may be sent via traditional mail or e-mail. A full name and street address are required for publication. Please include your telephone number for verification purposes. Letters should not exceed 300 words, and are subject to editing for accuracy, clarity, spelling, grammar, brevity and taste.

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Blossom boom

Planters installed in Elmwood inspire neighborhoods

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Photo by Lisa Brisson

It might be a small detail, but it's making a big impact.

Earlier this year, 50 large planters were placed along busy New Britain Avenue in Elmwood, brightening up the heavily traveled thoroughfare. Businesses benefitted by having a beautiful floral display at their entrances and the public has the opportunity to enjoy a touch of the natural world along the paved street and concrete sidewalks.

Charlie Hilborn, owner of Sheehan, Hilborn and Breen Funeral Home at 1084 New Britain Avenue, was instrumental in getting the planters installed.

"It turned out to be something really huge," he said. "It's much better than I could have imagined."

The idea was "planted" about two years ago when Hilborn was thinking about how to improve the look of the traffic islands in the main route outside his business. He was interested in having plantings put in the islands; however, the town turned down the idea.

Hilborn kept thinking, trying to find something that could be done to liven up this part of the community. What eventually came to mind were the plantings and hanging baskets he had seen along Main Street in Clinton, where he has a home by the water.

"It's so pretty," Hilborn said of that community's beautification efforts. "Why can't we do this in Elmwood."

At one point, someone had told him about the Hartford-based KNOX Inc. and the organization's work to bring 400 planters to downtown Hartford. Hilborn reached out to the group – that horticulture as a catalyst for community engagement, forging partnerships among residents, businesses and government to build stronger and more beautiful neighborhoods – and received a positive response.

Then, it just became a matter of Hilborn taking the time to ask other businesses along the stretch for their support. He went door to door seeking sponsors for planters; 30 businesses signed on. Additionally, Westfarms Mall voluntarily decided to add 10 planters and the Elmwood Business Association, of which Hilborn is an active member, also sponsored some.

Hilborn had the opportunity to

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Charlie Hilborn, owner of Sheehan, Hilborn and Breen Funeral Home in Elmwood, was instrumental in getting dozens of planters along New Britain Avenue.

Some businesses have the planters placed right outside their door.

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

meet fellow businesses along the route, some of which he knew nothing about before he stopped in to ask for their support.

The planters were installed in late June by KNOX Inc., which also regularly sends a crew to weed and water the planters. In the fall, the planters will be removed in preparation for winter.

"They are just really, really great people," Hilborn said of the organization.

Ron Pitz, director of KNOX Inc., explained that his organization has been working with the Hartford Business Improvement District for years now, providing planters.

They have another purpose besides adding a touch of natural elements to a city landscape, however. KNOX Inc. teaches Hartford residents ages 18 to 30 horticultural and landscaping skills, which help them land jobs in these industries. Participants grow the plants in the foundation's greenhouses and maintain them in the planters. The organization charges businesses for each planter located outside of their shop doors.

Pitz said that 90 percent of KNOX's mission is focused on Hartford, however, when Hilborn reached out to him, he saw no reason why the group could not branch out to West Hartford, too.

Pitz was invited to give a presentation at an Elmwood Business Association meeting so they could learn more about his organization and the idea Hilborn had for their neighborhood.

"Not only do we work with Hartford residents, but also at risk folks," Pitz said. "Ex-offenders. They liked the fact that we give people a second or third chance, whatever they need."

The foundation has 22 people working at Keeney and Goodwin golf courses in Hartford, Pitz said.

"They are all Hartford residents we trained at KNOX Inc. and we placed them at the golf courses. Those are the guys who had grown the plants for those planters; the benefits are far reaching."

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"I think people linger longer in an area that has some beautification effort going into it, they will shop longer."

–Ron Pitz, KNOX Inc. director

When other parts of town discovered what had taken place in Elmwood, they expressed interest as well. Bishops Corner was interested in sprucing up its area and Park Road merchants also expressed interest in bringing planters into their area.

"It lends itself to a totally different atmosphere of concrete and asphalt," Hilborn said. "Everybody likes flowers."

Bob Fressola, president of the Bishops Corner Neighborhood Association, said his group had learned about the Elmwood planters from Hilborn.

"I think it's a great idea," Fressola said. "The reason why the Bishops Corner Neighborhood Association was interested was one of our goals is to help beautify the Bishops Corner area. We thought that was one easy way to do that."

"The planters seem beautiful and the concept the KNOX Inc. developed made them hassle free. For us it was a no-brainer," Fressola said.

KNOX ran out of planters this year, but both Fressola and Pitz hope to revisit the concept next year.

In the meantime, some KNOX planters have been placed along Park Road, which also reached out to the organization following the success in Elmwood. There are planters outside of Effie's Place and A.C. Petersen Farms.

John Paindiris, co-president of the Park Road Association, first learned of the planters when the president of the Elmwood Business Association mentioned it at a Park Road meeting.

"I though it was a great idea," said Paindiris, owner of Effie's Place. "They were willing to extend the courtesy here," he said of the foundation.

While only a few planters have been added to Park Road, Paindiris said other businesses have expressed interest in getting more next year. "The planters are obviously beautiful," he said. "They are huge."

Diners at Effie's Place, especially those who enjoy the patio and get a close look at the planters, have commented on how nice they are.

"Aesthetically, even that little strip in Elmwood is so much more beautiful out there," Pitz said. "I think people linger longer in an area that has some beautification effort going into it, they will shop longer. I think the benefits are obvious as far as aesthetics. The real community strengthening is who is actually doing the work and how we are actually helping them."

Rick DiBella, West Hartford Department of Public Works grounds operation manager, said the town had maintained more than 100 large flowerpots on New Britain Avenue, Park Road, Bishops Corner and other locations in town. For about 15 years, it would do spring and fall plantings, but budget cuts ended the practice about six years ago. Efforts back then to get businesses to sponsor pots so the practice could continue was unsuccessful, DiBella said. **WHL**

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

The large three-foot planters are from KNOX Inc., which placed the planters along New Britain Avenue and help maintain them.

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Parenting help

Local dad and his partner launch supportive educational community online

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Matt Connell wishes Yellowbrick was around when he became a father eight years ago. He launched the supportive, educational online global community of experts, researchers and parents January 1.

He and his business partner, John Christensen, an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut, scoured the Internet and could not find a comprehensive space that provided credible, valuable information to parents while also allowing them to interact, so they created one and allow its users to remain anonymous.

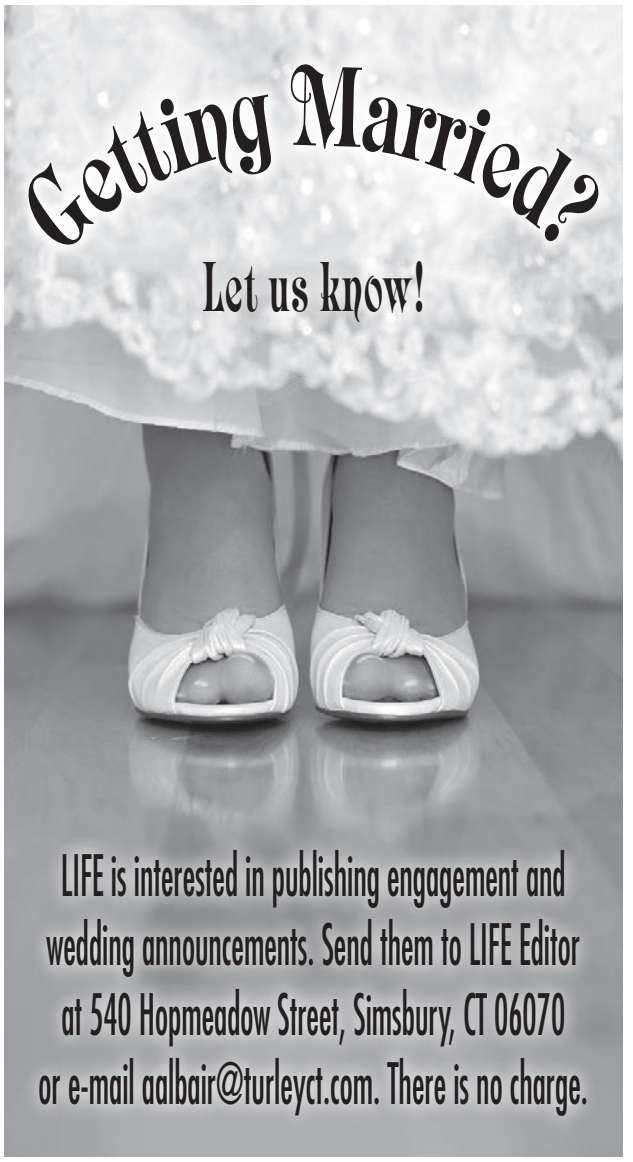
"All our research showed that parents wanted to get advice and give advice, but ... did not want to do it in a public space," Connell said.

Most said they put their best foot forward when dealing publicly with parenting issues – even small issues – or avoided certain topics altogether. This, Connell said, left them isolated. By being able to remain anonymous, "parents will feel more comfortable coming out of isolation and discussing the issues."

"At Yellowbrick's core is the concept of utilizing crowdsourced knowledge to create cutting-edge educational technologies, which are then disseminated to a world-wide social network comprised of parents, experts and researchers," Christensen said.

Photo by Lynn Woike

Matt Connell, his wife, Jordana, and their two children, Phineas and Ayelet, are just one of thousands of families who have been using the parenting support website he launched.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Connell said of "The Wizard of Oz" imagery of the Yellow Brick Road, "We're trying to emote life is a journey, parenting is a journey; wouldn't it be nice if we all had friends to help us along the way."

The site is broken up into sections.

Users can ask questions and have access to posts by other parents as well as child psychologists and other professionals. Recent posts included such topics as bringing up the subject of birth control, preventing Internet addiction, healthy eating and a list of the best public high schools by state.

"We bring in experts – licensed professionals, educators and researchers – to provide high-level, reliable information," Connell said.

Another feature that makes Yellowbrick different from other sites is that it provides tutorials on various parenting topics. That was something else their research showed, he said – parents want trustworthy information. While there is plenty of information on Facebook and other venues, reliability often comes into question.

Topics include how to encourage greater independence at home, traveling with children and protecting children from the media.

Parents can sign up for a free membership and get notifications about when the classes will take place.

Experts such as psychologists and family therapists provide helpful information, tips and other content via a blog. Their backgrounds and credentials are always included.

Soon, learning simulations will also be offered.

Christensen is a leader in using technology for education. He completed a PhD in social psychology at the University of Southern California and a postdoctoral fellowship in communication at the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on improving health and wellbeing through experiential learning. This is done by providing learners with hands-on experience and then having them reflect on that experience.

"Parenting is a journey; wouldn't it be nice if we all had friends to help us along the way."

–Matt Connell

For example, Christensen has produced educational movies, video games and virtual reality applications that allow people to practice healthy behaviors in virtual worlds that simulate real-life situations. Among his current projects are a virtual nightclub designed to prevent risky alcohol, drug, and sexual decisions among youth; a series of mobile phone applications designed to educate inner city youth about health risks; and a web-based virtual grocery store that communicates the risks of an unhealthy diet while providing people with an opportunity to practice making healthier food purchase decisions.

Christensen is adapting this cutting-edge experiential learning to Yellowbrick offerings. An example would be a program that would allow parents to have their children use to go through a series of scenarios in dealing with a police officer, with each action having a realistic outcome – all in a safe, virtual environment.

There would be a fee to access these programs.

The West Hartford-based startup has grown weekly. In July there were 8,500 unique visitors and 25,000 page views.

Now a parent of two children, Connell said, "I still need it. Regardless of the age of your kids, a parent can always use extra help."

The biggest challenge has been getting people to sign up to become registered users of the site and become engaged in the virtual community. Sign up is free and allows individuals to contribute. Registration is not required to access information.

Users can customize their social hub to get the news and advice they want, and help doing so is available.

They can also buy bricks, which serve as money on the site. These can be used to support research projects, donated to organizations on the community crowdfunding page, given to other Yellowbrick members or redeemed for rewards.

Connell, grew up in West Hartford, attending King Phillip for elementary and middle school. He graduated Hall High a semester early and spent the second half of his senior year in a kibbutz in Israel before going to King State in New Hampshire. He returned to Israel his sophomore year, traveling the Middle East, Africa and Europe. He then moved to Washington state.

He has a masters in business administration and an Ed.D.

An experienced entrepreneur, he and started a landscape business, among others. He returned to West Hartford in 1999 where he lives with his wife and two children.

He taught at Bulkeley High School in Hartford for several years. Currently, he's a business consultant and mentor at reSET in Hartford, in addition to helming Yellowbrick. **WHL**

Research results

Matt Connell and John Christensen discovered a large gap between the educational resources parents seek online and the information they are able to access. Key findings included:

- 53 percent of parents feel isolated
- 55 percent are afraid of looking like a bad parent
- 77 percent want to give social support
- 87 percent of parents want to share their knowledge
- 96 percent of parents want access to scientific research
- 97 percent need access to experts

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Resettling refugees

Faith communities join together to help families from Syria

by Lynn Woike
Editor

West Hartford is now home for this family.

Courtesy photo

The haunting photo of Aylan Kurdi, the 3-year-old drowned Syrian boy, wearing a red T-shirt and blue shorts, lying face-down on a Turkish beach sparked more than anguish and outrage when it went viral last September. In West Hartford, it sparked action that has given four Syrian families new homes and better futures.

The incident prompted Betty Leete, an immigration lawyer, to approach the Rev. Dr. Geordie Campbell, senior minister at First Church West Hartford. She said she told him she thought "the U.S. quota of refugees was terribly small and we need to help more, especially with Syrians."

Campbell brought it up to members of the West Hartford Clergy Association who were meeting in his study, reconnecting after last summer's pause and looking forward to the coming year.

He said, "Somewhere in our conversation I said, 'A member of my congregation is wondering if we can do something about the refugee crisis.' Michael Pinkus, senior rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel nodded, 'The same request came to me.'"

Other members of the association recognized the possibility. Stacy Emerson, senior pastor of First Baptist, said her church had a parsonage that might be available, while Mark Diters, pastor at United Church of Christ, and Len LaRoche, interim pastor at the Universalist Church, both said they would help.

Campbell recalled saying, "None of our congregations can do this alone, nor can it be carried only by clergy. How about if we make the conversation larger, get more of our colleagues around the table to test out the idea?"

That started the ball rolling.

Within two weeks, a dozen local clergy gathered, agreed that it was something to pursue and made plans to include other leaders in each of the faith communities.

The next meeting, hosted by Westminster Presbyterian Church Senior Pastor Julie Emery almost tripled the number of people interested.

"So, we went from six to 12 to 34. Before long," Campbell said, "we had a group of 75 folks. We all agreed on common values. We can do something. Hospitality. Welcome. Compassion. Love. No matter how we name our various traditions, we all hold these values as central."

"There were so many people who showed up," said Adlyn Loewenthal of Congregation Beth Israel.

She said she was prompted to get involved when Indiana Gov. Mike Pence refused to accept Syrian refugees after the deadly attacks in Paris, leaving a family stranded at John F. Kennedy International Airport. The married couple and their child were diverted to New Haven, where Gov. Dannel Malloy personally greeted them.

"They're taking on a new life in a new country with a new language, trying to integrate themselves and make a life here. ... You feel very responsible for helping them take the steps they need to take and not overwhelming them."

–Adlyn Loewenthal

"When that was in the news, it seemed it was time to stand up and do something," Loewenthal said. "If Malloy was going to be strong enough of a leader to take that stand and say, 'Come to Connecticut,' then I wanted to be part of the Connecticut population that would be welcoming those families in an active way."

While some of the groups began working with Catholic Charities, our group (Welcome Home West Hartford) wanted to explore Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services in New Haven, said Rev. Terry Schmidt of First Church West Hartford, who learned that Chris George, its executive director, lives in Glastonbury and had once been a parishioner of his.

The only day George could meet with the group was December 20. Despite being the Sunday before Christmas, twice as many people showed up as had at the previous meeting, Schmidt said.

"The energy behind this is unbelievable. The people who want to help – I've never seen anything like this. ... We had so many people in so many congregations, Geordie had the idea of splitting us up into groups with three congregations per group."

Every one was multi-denominational, except for two episcopal churches in town that formed their own group. First Church was grouped with First Baptist Church of West Hartford and Congregation Beth Israel.

Together, people from all three congregations began working with IRIS to prepare to host a refugee family, forming committees to handle a variety of needs, including housing, employment, health care and transportation.

Each group seeking to help a family was charged with raising $4,000. Schmidt said his group got nearly double that.

"It's not hard to raise money for this," he said.

Four representatives were sent to New Haven for training and returned to prepare the rest of the group. With all that done, they were placed on a waiting list.

It's typically rather quick after that, Schmidt said, adding that it can be faster if a group were willing to take on one of the difficult cases that pop up, such as relocating a family with a member in a wheelchair or a severe illness.

Given a two-week notice that their family would arrive June 7, Schmidt said they quickly readied everything for a couple and their three children, with another due in about two months.

"We knew they were Syrians. We knew they [spoke] very little English ... and we knew we had these three tiny children ... but not much else," Schmidt said.

A manual from IRIS details all the necessary steps – from providing a meal of traditional foods to obtaining medical care and handling the

employment search process.

"The first thing we do is go to the social security office to get a card. The next day, we go to the Department of Social Services and sign them up for everything possible," Schmidt said.

Having encountered the bureaucracy, he said he has been "extremely impressed" with how quickly everything has been proceeding.

"I can't say enough positive things about the experience," he said.

"Our job is to get this family to be independent in six months," Schmidt said.

Two months in, they were on schedule; he estimated they were 1/3 of the way there.

Leete said they are hoping to find a job for the father. While he's willing to do whatever is necessary to support his family, she's hoping he can teach Arabic to advanced students; in Syria, he taught Arablic in middle and high school for several years.

The smiles on the faces of the children and knowing you're making a difference are the most rewarding aspects of the project, Schmidt said.

Typically, when you see large, international issues in the media, "you feel small and helpless, and, instead of that, in this situation, we feel empowered and helpful. It's very tangible; it's extremely hands-on. ... We're helping them survive and thrive and become active and productive members of our society. It's a profoundly gratifying feeling," he said.

The first thing Loewenthal of Congregation Beth Israel signed up for was to prepare a welcome night meal. As soon as she learned the family would be from Syria, she bought a Syrian cookbook and began making a lot of food.

She's also helped the family get English lessons. The father, who knows some English, is traveling to Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford three times a week while someone is working with the mother at home.

The committee found "some children's books in English and Arabic, so they've been reading those to the kids," Loewenthal said.

"In addition to that, a lot of what I've been doing is bringing them to doctor appointments," she said.

There were weekly obstetrician appointments, appointments for all the children – some who may need eyeglasses and one who may have a hearing loss – and an MRI for the father, who had extreme back and leg pain.

"They're still being evaluated," Loewenthal said.

She has driven the father to the supermarket and helped him shop, and borrowed a large SUV to bring the entire family to New Haven for three days so they could attend the orientation program required of all the families placed by IRIS.

Now, with four car seats required for the children, the two adults and sometimes a translator, two vehicles will often be needed, but "we have lots of drivers," she said.

Courtesy photos

Local places of worship have formed committees that are helping refugee families resettle in the area.

While IRIS requires at least 10 active committee members to be assigned a family, she said it takes more like 20, at least initially.

"This really takes a village," Loewenthal said, adding that the sense of responsibility is great.

Judy Allen from First Baptist has been extremely active – she is responsible for securing the three-bedroom apartment and getting it furnished, driving family members to appointments, babysitting, translating grocery lists and more.

"Our family is welcoming, and there is no such thing as a short visit. I am always asked to stay, sit, and have some coffee – very, very strong coffee," Allen said.

Loewenthal said, "People come from a traumatic situation. ... They come with nothing and they know next to nothing about how this country works. ... They're taking on a new life in a new country with a new language, trying to integrate themselves and make a life here. ... You feel very responsible for helping them take the steps they need to take and not overwhelming them."

Calling them "a beautiful family," she said, "They're extremely grateful for everything that's being done for them. They are eager to move on. They don't want to stay in this position of not being able to do [things] for themselves."

Helping them has proved rewarding.

Speaking of all those with whom she's come on contact in the process of helping this family, Allen said, "Everyone's been wonderful. ... Everyone's been so, so supportive. It's amazing."

While the formal commitment was for six months, the group made a commitment that they would be there for a year, Loewenthal said, adding it will likely be longer than that.

"We want to see the kids grow up," she said.

A second Syrian family – a couple with twin boys and a daughter – that arrived on the same plane was also settled in West Hartford by another group of local churches headed up by

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Linda Scacco of Universalist Church of West Hartford. Along with her church, the team is comprised of the First Presbyterian Church in Hartford and a number of other people, including Fatma Antar, her husband and others from the Islamic Association of Greater Hartford in Berlin.

Antar came to the United States as an immigrant and knows how much help a supportive community of people is; it was something she did not have.

She co-chairs her group's culture committee to educate the Syrian family about American culture and the Americans who are helping about the Syrian culture. She also lines up translators as needed.

"When they arrived, the biggest shock for him is he could not smoke inside the apartment," she said.

The family also found it strange that when they'd look out of the window of their Farmington Avenue apartment, no one was walking around outside.

"They were used to busy streets," Antar said.

The language barrier has been the biggest challenge for both the families and the hosts, she said. A team of 15 translators is on call, and efforts to teach family members English are resulting in some progress, she said, "especially with the kids," who will begin school in August.

Another challenge is helping the family learn the set of customs that require respect and laws that must be followed.

"It's all very different" than what they were accustomed to, Antar said, and the group of people willing to help in any way possible is wonderful.

Scacco is in charge of that group. The emails she sends out go to 60 people, 20 of whom form the group's core.

The apartment they secured is filled with donated furniture and household items.

"IRIS pays some of their rent, they're getting food stamps and DCF, but it's expensive to live in this area … so we are going to raise more money in this fall," Scacco said. "The outpouring of our church … has been really wonderful. It's heartwarming."

Bebe Billings, one of the children's tutors, waits with a refugee family in Elizabeth Park before CNN arrived to do an interview.

Courtesy photo

Rather than present the family with used clothing, the committee has asked for gift cards and monetary donations. A request for a bike and fishing poles netted multiple offers, she said.

The most challenging part of the process has been communicating with the family, Scacco said. When a translator is not available, they depend on their smartphones to use Google Translate, although it must be monitored closely to be certain the intended words are being interpreted.

"It's hard because we want to talk to them and get to know them," Scacco said. "They're really nice people. We love the kids. The kids are adorable. They're well behaved and they really want to learn."

A third family arrived August 4 and will live in the same building as this family, while a fourth was settled earlier in Bloomfield.

"We're really trying to get them in touch with each other," Scacco said of the refugee families, noting excursions to parks as one of the ways they have accomplished that.

"There's a lot of fear in our country about bringing Syrian refugees in. We hear a lot about that in the news, but I think it's important for people to know that they're very well vetted by the government," she said. "They went through two years of interviews and background checks. … Only a very small percentage of people make it out of the country. … If you make it through that process, it's pretty clear that there's nothing in your background that the government is concerned about." **WHL**

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Custom crafted

Jewelry designer creates pieces using methods he learned in Armenia

by Sloan Brewster
Staff Writer

When it comes to engagement rings, Armen Manukyan advises men to let the women take the creative reins.

"It's a rule of thumb for me," said Manukyan, the owner of Armeny Custom Jewelry Design in West Hartford.

While it's rare that couples disagree about a ring's design, it can happen, he said. What's more likely is that the groom will come in without the bride-to-be.

"Guys come alone without her because it's a surprise or something, so most of them come to me. Some of them know what she likes and they give me ideas," he said. "Some say, 'This is what she likes, if you can give me ideas.' I do that."

When they come in with no ideas, Manukyan said he recommends they "go very, very simple." Going too complex could well end up being a waste of time because she may not like it.

He also does not recommend that clients go with overly fine designs for engagement rings. If they insist, he warns them it will be too fragile for everyday wear and they may soon be returning it to his shop for repairs.

The biggest challenge isn't generally about design, however, Manukyan said. It's about getting the size right without asking the girl.

Photos by Sloan Brewster

After milling out wax models, Armen Manukyan, owner of Armeny Custom Jewelry Design in West Hartford, sits at his workbench, working by hand to craft pieces of jewelry.

"That's the fun part, when they try to find finger size," he said. "They steel rings. ... They do all kinds of tricks to find out."

Unlike the design, the ring size doesn't always come out on target, despite all the tricks.

"We have a couple times made mistakes," Manukyan admitted. "Especially guys who are really confident, they are usually the ones who make mistakes."

In addition to engagement rings, he designs all sorts of finely crafted pieces including right hand rings, necklaces, earrings, bracelets,

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Armeny Custom Jewelry Design, located next to Luna Pizza on Farmington Avenue, offers a wide variety of jewelry.

watches and cuff links.

"It's all about diversity of jewelry styles and ideas," he said.

When Manukyan designs a piece of jewelry, the process begins with a consultation. Then he makes some sketches and once everyone comes to an agreement, he creates a wax model. With that, he can replicate it in whatever metal the client desires and when the piece is ready, put the stones in place.

Ashley Marolda shows off her wedding and engagement ring, designed and crafted by Armen Manukyan.

Manukyan studied the ancient art of jewelry making in his homeland of Armenia.

"Jewelry is very ancient from Armenia," he said. "There is a lot of history, coins, historical jewelry made in ancient Armenia thousands of years ago."

Manukyan employs those old techniques, even when he is using modern technology, such as laser welding, to make and design pieces.

"I still try to do a lot of handwork, to employ that you have to do jewelry by hand," he said. "It's computer aided but it never replaces hand work."

Manukyan can work in any metal – white gold, platinum, yellow gold, silver – and all kinds gems.

The gems he uses are based on more than the customer's preferences, he said. It's also a matter of how often the client will wear the piece and if it needs to be durable. If so, certain stones won't make the cut.

"Emeralds are too soft for everything," he said. "I never made an engagement ring with emeralds and I never will."

He does have ideas for colorful options however, stones that are durable and will stand up to daily wear, such as chrysoberyl. Chrysoberyl is found in only two mines in Africa and comes in shades of green and yellow.

"It is very close to a sapphire's strength," he said, showing a picture of a ring made of the green stones. "It has great brilliance; I mean it's a great stone."

"I don't call myself artistic but my customers do. I'm a more technical person."

–Armen Manukyan

Despite his knowledge and success at making custom jewelry, Manukyan does not consider himself an artist.

"I don't call myself artistic but my customers do," he said. "I'm a more technical person, I would say, but I'm trying to incorporate both because I don't want to make industrial pieces, I want to incorporate both and I'm very picky about that."

Ashley Marolda, of Avon is one of those customers. Marolda learned of Manukyan through a coworker and has since referred him to several family members and friends. He has made several pieces of jewelry for her, including her engagement ring and wedding band.

"He's very creative in his designs and he's very honest and not pushy at all," Marolda said. "He works with you on any budget that you have and he does not make you feel uncomfortable."

When Marolda was looking for designs for her engagement ring, she and her fiancé did not want to spend a lot of money, she said. Manukyan found creative ways to reduce the cost.

She was especially impressed with her wedding band, which she had hoped would be different and original.

"My favorite piece that he's done [is] my wedding band," she said. "He had to get really creative for that and he did a great job."

She described the band as braided, with one of the strands interlaced with diamonds and the other made of platinum.

For Marolda's 30th birthday, her mother gave her her wedding ring. Manukyan removed the diamonds and reset them, making a pair of earrings, with a cluster of diamonds for each ear.

"Those are very special," Marolda said.

Manukyan immigrated to the U.S. from Armenia in 2000. He came because he had family here, but he also came in search of the American Dream.

He wanted to create something and run his own business.

Manukyan had studied engineering in Armenia, but said he never had the chance to work in the field as there were no jobs.

He started creating fashionable jewelry designs and was able to earn "great money." He also imagined integrating jewelry with machines, something that was not done at the time.

When he arrived in the in the States, he started his business in the basement of his Plainville home, using tools he brought from Armenia.

"It was kind of a blind move," he said. "You never know what you're doing."

He began developing a clientele, doing custom orders and repairs until he opened his shop on Farmington Avenue in West Hartford, next to Luna Pizza.

Jewelry is not Manukyan's only love. He has a long list of hobbies including scuba diving, piloting, sports, skiing biking, fishing in the Farmington River, boating, videography and martial arts.

He also enjoys foreign languages. In addition to his native tongue of Armenian, he speaks fluent Russian and English, and understands French and Spanish.

Manukyan said he spent a long time looking for a way to give back to the community, and was frustrated that he could find no one who wanted him to design jewelry specifically for a cause to which he would then donate the proceeds. Then he discovered the Ron Foley Foundation, which raises funds for medical research leading to more effective treatment of pancreatic cancer. Manukyan, who had a close family friend that died of pancreatic cancer, participates in some of the foundation's fundraisers.

"He's gotten to know us, we've gotten to know him," Jennifer Laugh of the Ron Foley Foundation said. "Armen always participates in one shape or form."

With the Ron Foley Collection, he also finally got to create jewelry for a cause close to his heart. The collection consists of rings, pendants, cuff links and earrings adorned with purple stones, the color for pancreatic cancer awareness.

"I created this style because I always wanted to give back to the community," he said.

Manukyan crafted some ideas and showed them to the folks at the foundation.

"Absolutely gorgeous," Laugh said of the final designs. "I mean he's an artist." **WHL**

Armen Manukyan crafted this collection for the Ron Foley Foundation.

Photos by Sloan Brewster

Members of the class pose for a photo on the steps of West Hartford Town Hall.

Courtesy photo

Preparing future leaders

Prestigious police training program offered for first time in the Northeast

by Mark Jahne
LIFE Staff

The object of the class is to prepare the next generation of men and women who will run police departments all over the country. Teaching them how to handle all of the challenges and pitfalls they may face will make them better prepared for senior management.

That's why 42 lower and middle management police personnel gathered for 10 weeks in the training room of the West Hartford Police Department to participate in the Command Officers Leadership Course taught by the Southern Police Institute.

SPI is part of the Division of Criminal Justice in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville.

Lt. Michael Perruccio, commander of the WHPD training division, said it is a highly prestigious class with a strong national reputation. This is the first time the institute came to New England and he was delighted to play host.

"This is their flagship program," he said.

Officers from all over the state, as well as a few from Massachusetts, registered to attend the program with financial support from the J. Allen Lamb and Edward S. Pocock III Foundation. Pocock is a retired Southington police captain.

Participants ranged in rank from sergeants to lieutenants, captains and deputy chiefs.

"The whole idea of this course was to get people from different areas and different regions together," Perruccio said. "There really wasn't a lot [else] offered for mid-level training."

The group began meeting in April and recently celebrated its completion. It ran in cycles, with two weeks on and two weeks off. Many participants become involved in staff studies and small group projects, and Perruccio said their dedication to that was impressive.

"We've talked about pursuits, community relations, budgeting, recruitment and retention" and much more, he said.

A constant presence in the classroom was Gil Frazier, a retired deputy police chief from Hollywood, Florida, and an SPI leader. He teaches a course entitled Managing a Small Law Enforcement Agency.

Featured speakers included a top administrator from the Kentucky State Police, an assistant chief from Tampa and a representative of Scotland Yard.

On one particular day, the guest speaker was Lt. Rudy Gonzalez of the Miami/Dade County Police Department in Florida. He focused on internal affairs structures and investigations.

Gonzalez spoke about how to handle high-profile investigations, the importance of fair and equal discipline, corruption in the ranks, how to prevent problems from occurring and what to do about the one or two officers who tend to cause the majority of a department's headaches.

Frazier was pleased with the quality and intellect of the people who registered for this program, calling them highly motivated.

"A lot of people in that room are fairly sophisticated. They know their jobs well," he said.

But that doesn't mean they can automatically rise to the next rank. They need to understand the practical

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Lt. Rudy Gonzalez of the Miami/Dade County Police Department in Florida gives a presentation on internal affairs policies and procedures.

Photo by Mark Jahne

applications that come with each step up the career ladder.

"There is a transition to be made from first-line manager," he said. "Most of what we teach is on a federal level."

Frazier enjoyed his time in Connecticut and the welcome he received from his students and, in particular, the WHPD. He also appreciated "excellent feedback from the participants."

"The hospitality up here has been fantastic," he said.

SPI is so impressed with the quality of the law enforcement professionals who signed up for this class that Frazier said it plans to bring the program back to the Northeast next year, most likely to the Boston area.

The recent killings of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge, as well as highly publicized police shootings of black men, were discussed frequently during the course of this program.

They also studied in depth the report that was issued following an investigation of a high-profile incident in Ferguson, Missouri, in which an officer shot and killed a teenage boy of color.

"We've talked a lot about those things here in this class. It's a difficult job and it's not going to get any easier," Frazier said.

Today's police officer is, in general, more highly educated that those of previous generations, and he considers that a valuable component of any police agency.

Two of the participants were brothers Rob and Mark Catania, veteran officers from Rocky Hill and Glastonbury, respectively. Both hold the rank of lieutenant. They greatly enjoyed the class.

"The whole idea of this course was to get people from different areas and different regions together."

–Lt. Michael Perruccio

Rob Catania said not every officer wants to take on additional rank or responsibility, but those who do can benefit greatly from a course such as this one. He praised the instructors for their skill and knowledge.

"It's excellent. We had a pretty exciting section in dealing with the different generations of cops. There are a lot of very good leaders in this class, a lot of potential chiefs. It's been a really rewarding experience."

He said policing in the United States differs somewhat from one region to another, and a national class like this can highlight those differences and allow participants to learn new outlooks and skills. Most of the students displayed great enthusiasm and showed up early for class on a consistent basis, he added.

"It's a whole new outlook on a couple different aspects of the job," Mark said. "There are 42 different opinions, 42 different ideas" among the participants. "I think it's going to help me get to the next step on the command staff."

He has learned a great deal not only from the course materials and speakers, but also from the other students. One important area he mentioned was how messages from senior police management should be presented to rank and file officers, as well as the public.

He made a lot of new friends and also enjoyed the opportunity to network with those from other departments. It gave him a whole new outlook on what is expected from high-ranking officials by those two constituent groups, he said. He looks forward to sharing what he has learned with his fellow Glastonbury officers. **WHL**

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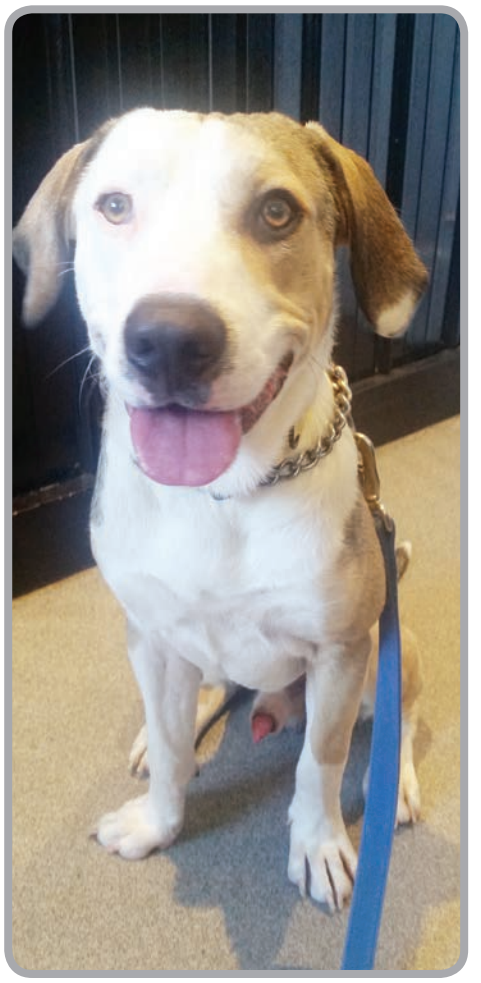

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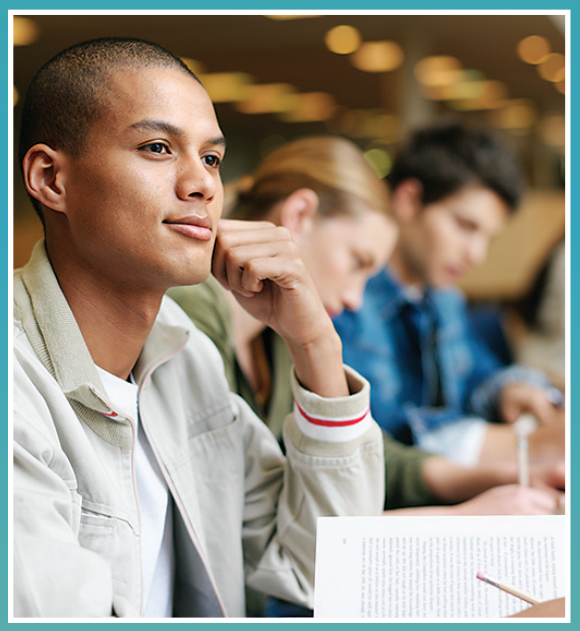

SCHOOL

September 2016

Back to School

New principals, veteran educators

Leadership changes for three elementary schools

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

Three schools in West Hartford will start the school year with new principals but familiar faces.

Shannon Mlodzinski will formally take the reins of Aiken Elementary, a school she has led on an interim basis since January and at which she served as curriculum specialist since 2011.

Kelly Brouse, a lifelong West Hartford resident and longtime district teacher, will lead Bugbee Elementary School. She most recently worked as a curriculum specialist at Morley Elementary.

Former Whiting Lane Elementary principal Nancy DePalma will return to the role for a one-year stint, filling in for Karen Kukish, who is on childrearing leave.

DePalma retired this summer from her position as assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment, which she had held since 2012.

West Hartford LIFE caught up with these three veteran administrators who are now in new roles to ask them a few questions about their careers, lives and hopes for the future of their schools and students.

Shannon Mlodzinski

Mlodzinski earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Saint Joseph and her sixth year certificate in educational leadership from Central Connecticut State University.

She taught in West Hartford for eight years before becoming the curriculum specialist at Aiken in 2011.

She is a graduate of the West Hartford Public Schools Leadership Academy.

When Superintendent of Schools Tom Moore announced that she would officially become Aiken's principal after her interim service, he called her "unequivocally the right fit."

"Shannon took over a little after mid-year of this year, and her calm presence, her intelligence, her devotion to kids, her cooperation with teachers, her communication with parents, made it so within two or three weeks I was threatened with, 'Well, Shannon had better become the

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principal at Aiken,'" Moore said with a laugh when he announced her appointment to the Board of Education. "We are so lucky to have Shannon. The people love her there."

The feeling, for Mlodzinski, is mutual.

Her love for both Aiken and elementary education as a whole runs deep.

"Elementary school builds foundational skills," she said, adding of her Aiken colleagues, "I believe we are a sum of our parts and everything we accomplish together is better than anything we can do individually. Kids are in school for a very long time, and elementary school is where it all starts. ... We lay the foundation for education that lies ahead."

With five years at Aiken under her belt, Mlodzinski has the benefit of already knowing the staff, students and families. She plans to focus on growth within her new role, building upon the consistency she established as interim principal and strengthening ties to the West Hartford community at large.

"Aiken is kind of tucked away in the corner of town, people don't hear a lot about it," she said. "I want to celebrate our very vibrant, diverse community. Student achievement, of course, is [something you want to recognize], but I want to work for ways to recognize all the great things that are going on in our school as we keep moving forward. I hope to stay there for a very long time so I hope to build on that each year."

Although she is energized by her new role, Mlodzinski's passion for the job is rooted in the classroom with the students.

She was always one to become invested in her students; she recalled attending piano recitals and bar mitzvahs in support of the children.

"I loved to see that progression of those little third graders and fifth graders going out into the world and starting new lives," she said.

More than anything else, she appreciated the "a-ha" moments.

"I was lucky to be in elementary school where kids are so expressive," she said. "I think for me it was just that look on a child's face that moment where you know they get it, that look when you know they make that connection and they understand. That's something they and you will never forget."

When students leave Aiken, she hopes they will be confident, determined people who are excited to continue the learning process, but most of all, she said, she hopes they will know they were cared for.

That is a desire that has evolved since she became a mother to her now 3-year-old daughter, Ashlin.

"There I times I wish I could go back to the classroom [before I was a parent] and have some of those students back again," she said. "Looking at things from both a parent and educator viewpoint, your perspective changes. All of our jobs are to advocate for that child, because every child is someone's child. We all want to see the same growth for our kids. We can't loose sight of the big picture and all the aspects that make each students so great and make them who they are."

Outside of school, Mlodzinski is a member of the West Hartford Women's Soccer League, and enjoys reading and spending time with her daughter.

Inside the school is not only a place she loves now, but a place she always knew she wanted to be.

"I can never remember a time when I wanted to be anything other than a teacher," she said.

Courtesy photos

Kelly Brouse

Brouse plans to "hit the ground learning" at Bugbee.

She attended Webster Hill and Sedgwick before graduating from Conard High School. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees as well as her sixth year certificate from the University of Connecticut.

She began her teaching career

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as an enrichment teacher in the district before teaching sixth grade English/Language Arts at Sedgwick Middle School. Like Mlodzinski, she is a graduate of the West Hartford Leadership Academy.

"Kelly has been a tremendous asset to each school community where she has worked with her talent to comfortably facilitate meaningful relationships between teachers, students and families," Moore said when he named Brouse to her new role.

Her husband, Steve Brouse, was a Bugbee teacher until this year – he will be moving to Wolcott Elementary – and when the Bugbee principal slot opened he encouraged his wife, who was hoping to apply for such a leadership role, that the school was the right place for her to lead.

She was six months pregnant when she applied for the position and just gave birth to her second child, a baby boy named John, in recent weeks.

Dr. Ellen Stokoe, a retired West Hartford principal, will lead the school until November when Brouse returns full time.

Brouse spent much of the summer at the school, familiarizing herself with the community and she plans to make "guest appearances" during the fall.

"Kids are going to learn amazing things in the West Hartford public schools. ... If we can make sure they're also people who know how to make good choices and to put themselves in positions to succeed, I think we've done our job."

–Kelly Brouse

"The reason I applied to this position is because I knew the staff was so incredible. They are so dedicated to their craft and the kids in the room. I need to learn the ins and outs of why that's the case here," she said. "What makes Bugbee so successful is the collaborative team of adults. This is a place that has already established a really strong climate among the staff, so it's all about building on that and growing together."

To begin with, she wants to start a learning process among teaching peers. "The best way for teachers to get better is to learn from each other," she said.

Though she always enjoyed leadership roles and appreciates the ability to make a difference beyond the classroom, she reveled in her teaching experiences and said, "It was really important for me to know West Hartford deeply at an elementary level before stepping in to lead a school in that way."

A former camp counselor, Brouse said she has been passionate about making kids' lives better since she was young.

"There is nothing more fulfilling than being with kids all day," she said. "Even leaving the classroom a little earlier than some principals do, I try to stay connected."

As a curriculum specialist, Brouse said, "the hardest part is you miss being their 'person.'"

"When you're their teacher, you are the one that holds all the cards to make sure they're OK," she said.

As principal, she feels she is returning to that capacity on a grand scale – responsible for every student in the building and who they will be when the move on to their next school.

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she said. "Kids are going to learn amazing things in the West Hartford Public Schools. Every teacher, every classroom: they're going to come away with skills and knowledge. But if we can make sure they're also people who know how to make good choices and to put themselves in positions to succeed, I think we've done our job."

Brouse knows from her own student experience that such an outcome is possible in West Hartford.

"I've always wanted to be here. I've loved every teacher I've had. They've all had an impact on me," she said of growing up in the district. "There is no place, I think, that does education better."

She is excited that her 18-month-old son, Michael, and now infant son will be students in West Hartford as well.

"Every decision I make now [as principal], I think about what I would want if it was my kid, because it could potentially be him in a couple of years. As I watch kids go through the halls, or as situations come up, every child that I deal with is somebody's Michael," she said just before her second son was born. "Every child is somebody's miracle. That's very important for me to know."

DePalma is pictured with Superintendent Tom Moore at this year's West Hartford's Cookin' event, which recognized the outgoing assistant superintendent.

Nancy DePalma

DePalma spent 45 years in education and nearly 30 of those in the West Hartford schools.

She attended the University of Saint Joseph – which at the time was Saint Joseph's College – and originally intended to earn a degree in business administration.

"I didn't want to be a teacher," she said with a laugh. "I either wanted to be in human resources or law."

But it was 1966 and the business world was not as accepting of a place for women.

She switched to education.

"Once I got into the classroom, I was like 'Holy cow, this is really where I want to be.'"

DePalma was prepared to retire fully this summer, but couldn't pass on the chance to return to Whiting Lane, she said.

"When the opportunity came up, it was so great," she said. "I don't think I would take it if it was another school, but this is a great way to not only leave central office, but ease my way into retirement. The staff there is so wonderful and the families are great."

DePalma is a licensed professional counselor, something she said has always aided her in educational settings to build trust and relationships.

What she loves about Whiting Lane is the fact that it is a district early learning center school serving children with special needs as part of its student population.

"It's an introduction to another level of diversity for our students," she said. "In addition to all the academic skillsets, they get this social, emotional skillset of understanding what it's like to learn differently."

"Our kids were learning technology before it was fashionable to use technology," she added, referencing text-to-speech and other methodology. "When we look at Common Core, teachers are shifting their way of teaching to an inquiry-based style of learning; staff at Whiting Lane were doing that early on."

DePalma thinks of herself as "a closer," she said with a smile in her voice. "I'm the person to come in there and keep the ship afloat. They're going to be fine," she said.

In the interim role, she plans to "keep an excellent system moving forward."

"That's what I want to do, is leave the place so when Karen comes back it's a seamless transition for her to move in. This is the best way for me to sail into retirement." **WHL**

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Back *to* School

Getting a back-to-school boost

Tips, tricks and trends for shopping

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

The end of carefree summer days can be a bummer, but going back to school can be an exciting time, especially if students have some new clothes to boost their confidence.

Amanda Sirica, spokesperson for Westfarms mall, said back-to-school sales and promotions are in full swing as summer ends, but many of them will last beyond the first day of school.

"This is the second biggest selling season for retailers," she said, second only to the Christmas season. "There's still a considerable amount of back-to-school shopping after school starts."

The number one item on most students' list, regardless of age, is a new backpack. After the previous year's daily use, Sirica said kids want a new backpack. Elementary school students are drawn to bright colors and designs, which brands like Jansport offer. For a sportier look, many students opt for backpacks from the North Face, which offer mesh side pockets, bungee cords on the outside and a waterproof lining. Vera Bradley backpacks boast a variety of colorful, patterned options.

Sirica said there will be a lot of personality on students' feet this fall, as sneakers are getting a makeover.

"Vans, Converse and Nike are doing things with geometric patterns, floral and animal print," she said, with high-top versions popular this year. "White Converse Chuck Taylors are popular."

Denim is a staple in back-to-school wardrobes, and skinny jeans and "jeggings" are a return trend for girls. Boys gravitate towards relaxed fit and bootcut jeans.

"Something new this year is you'll see more of the distressed denim, but you're also going to see some fresh, frayed hemlines that are going to be new to the denim scene for kids," Sirica said.

Since back-to-school shopping is all about comfort and practicality, she said she's seeing a lot of activewear on students' wish lists. It's been a staple in boys' closets for a long time, but it's becoming popular with girls, too, with brands like Adidas, Puma, Nike and Under Armour.

"It can take them from the hallway to after-school sports practice," she said.

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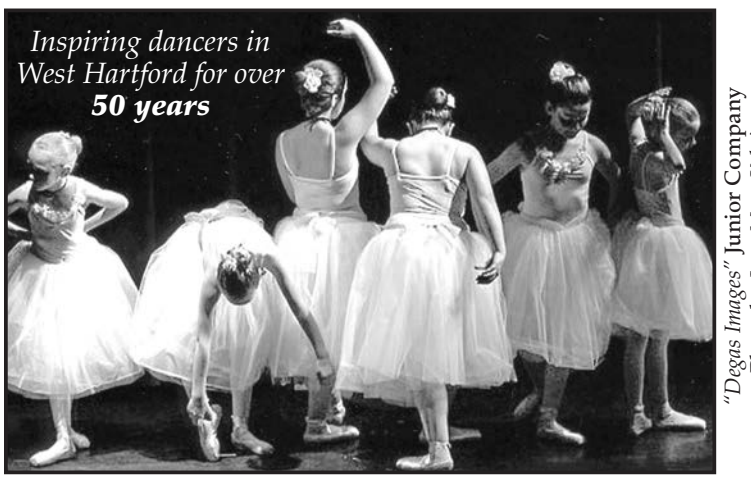

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Back to School

For girls, printed leggings are on trend this season, which Sirica said are the "ultimate piece" for a mix-and-match wardrobe of girls of all ages. For boys, it's all about layering.

"They really like to wear the embellished short sleeve graphic tees," she said. "It's a go-to, paired with their favorite jeans and a button-down shirt, whether it's a printed plaid or a real classic button-down polo shirt."

High low hemlines on tops are a continuing trend for girls, and varsity sweaters are a new trend for boys. Button-down dress shirts in denim, chambray or plaid are popular for girls, which Sirica said are perfect to pair with knee-high boots or leggings as the weather cools down. Ankle booties or Converse are also options.

"We're seeing a lot of boho-inspired peasant tops. They're fun and flirty for girls' wardrobes. They're very feminine with embroidery and lace appliques," she said. "For boys, the classic golf polo shirt in vibrant colors [is popular]."

Sirica said back-to-school shopping is "an excellent time" to take advantage of discounts and replace worn-out basics like socks, underwear and T-shirts.

"The sales and promotions are plentiful. Take advantage of those," she said.

Fall can be a tricky season to shop for, with cool mornings at the bus stop and warm afternoons at recess. While many retailers are already stocked with warmer wear, Sirica said layering is key for fall.

"Kids can shed layers in the classroom or at recess. It's better to be prepared than not," she said.

The key to successful back-to-school shopping is taking advantage of timing and tools to stay within budget, she said. Make a list of what each child needs, and start with the basics – denim, sneakers and a new backpack. Designate the stores to visit ahead of time, making the trip more efficient.

"Back-to-school shopping for some parents can be a daunting task, so it does make it easier to see what's on sale before you shop, have a plan and get in and out quick. Set expectations with a budget and goals," she suggested.

Before even making a list, Sirica said it's smart to take stock of what's in a child's wardrobe.

"Start by taking inventory of what you already have. If there's not a recent growth spurt, you're in luck. If you ask parents, they will do that – take the time to clean out the closet, see what fits and what we need," she said.

It's not necessary to buy a completely new wardrobe; Sirica said adding in key new pieces to spruce up existing clothing is enough to give kids the boost they need going back to school.

"Back-to-school clothes make kids feel good. They make them feel ready to take on a new year with new goals in the classroom," she said.

Although most people associate back-to-school shopping with clothes, Sirica said this is a perfect time to take advantage of the sales and promotions at technology retailers. Smartphones, tablets and laptops are all popular purchases this time of year, and not just for students. Parents can benefit from these sales, too. **WHL**

"Back-to-school clothes make kids feel good. They make them feel ready to take on a new year with new goals in the classroom."

–Amanda Sirica, a spokesperson for for Westfarms

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Tips for transitioning to middle school

A child's school-aged years are filled with many different lessons and experiences. While in school, kids have the opportunity to broaden their horizons and meet new people.

Many students will attend various schools before moving on to college, and therefore they must learn how to adjust to new schools. While many students attend elementary school together for years, students may not know their classmates once they make it to middle school, which tends to boast larger student bodies than elementary schools. That's because many middle schools' student bodies are a combination of several elementary schools. Making the transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high can spark anxiety in students, but that does not have to be the case.

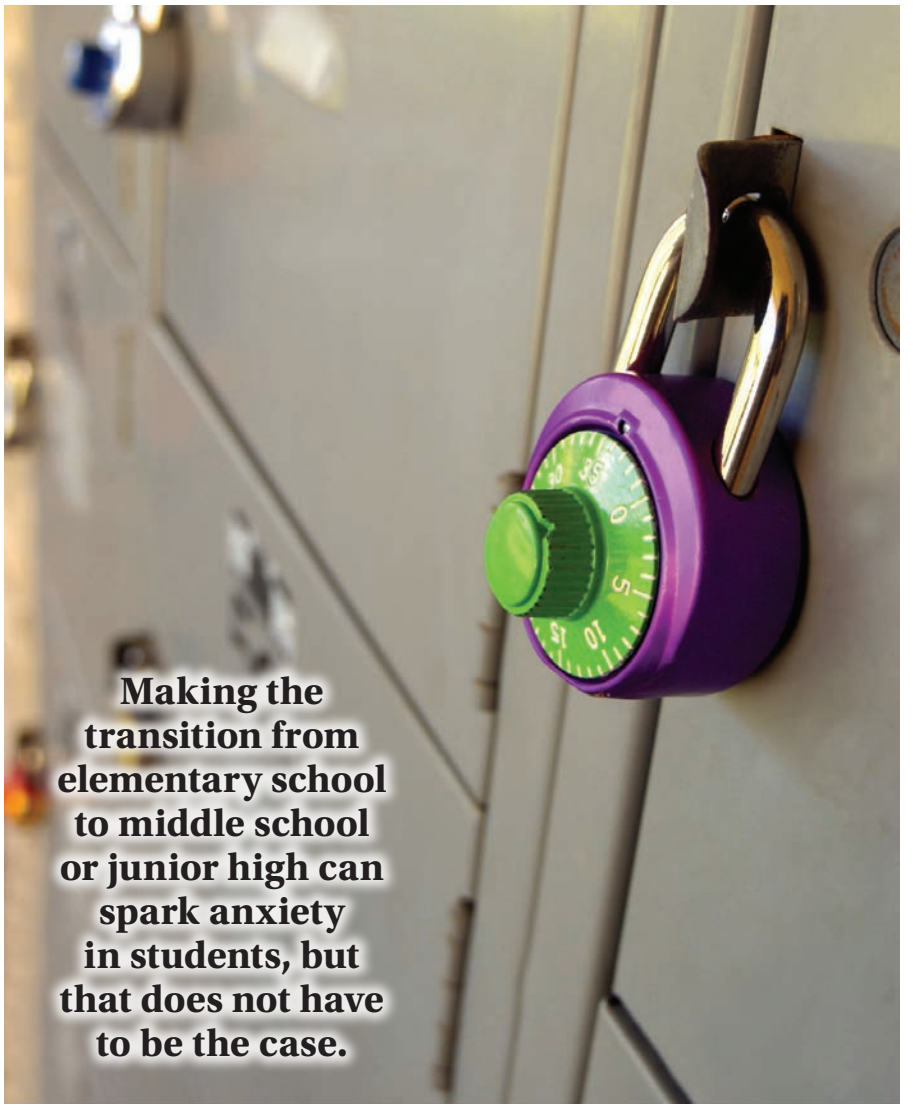
The National Education Association says a common element of a successful middle school experience is a smooth and positive transition from elementary school. The following are a few ways students can handle their transition to middle school.

• Participate in a school-based transition program. Middle schools frequently host open houses for elementary school students, who can take tours of the campus. Parents can take part in these events with their children. If your schedule does not allow you to attend, then schedule a private tour with the middle school principal or a faculty member. Middle school guidance counselors or guest speakers also may make the rounds, visiting elementary schools directly. Be sure your student attends such information sessions so he or she can get an idea of what to expect during middle school.

• Dispel any myths your youngster might have heard about middle school. Youngsters hear lots of things about middle schools, and much of what kids hear might be untrue. Ask kids what they have heard about the schools they will be moving on to, and then do your best to dispel any myths.

• Find a middle school buddy. Ask an older sibling or invite someone who is currently enrolled in the school to speak with your child and answer any questions he or she may have. Hearing directly from a fellow student may make your child feel more comfortable about what to expect.

• Talk about any other fears. Engage in an open dialogue with your son or daughter about any additional fears he or she may have. If students are worried about academics, spend some time over the summer going over the curriculum. If the potential for peer pressure is a cause for concern, reinforce advice on how to react to peer pressure.


Making the transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high can spark anxiety in students, but that does not have to be the case.

Parents and their children can take several steps to make students' transitions to middle school as smooth as possible. **WHL**

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Start the year right

Safety concerns to keep in mind when returning to school halls

by Alison Rivera
Staff Writer

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

The to-do list at the start of the school year can often be lengthy to make sure students are prepared with the right school supplies, clothes and books, but a child's health is also a top priority for ensuring a great school year. Multiple absences from illness or other health concerns can lead to children falling behind in their education or struggling to catch up on missed work. Here are three areas that may be forgotten when preparing a student to return to school.

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Back to School

Back and shoulders

Many high schools offer students a wide variety of classes and electives to take, but oftentimes that means more items to carry around in students' backpacks.

"It's obviously a growing problem as packs over the years have gotten bigger and books have gotten heavier," Dr. Stuart Horen of Horen Chiropractic in Farmington said. "Some of the schools are not utilizing lockers as much as they used to so sometimes these kids have to carry around these heavy text books all day."

While carrying such weight can lead to problems in the spine, neck and shoulders, Horen said that there are strategies that students and their parents can utilize to ensure the least amount of injury.

According to Horen, the proper pack size may depend on the size of the student.

"Try not to have a backpack that's more than 5 to 10 percent of your body weight," he suggested.

In addition to the size and weight of the bags, Horen said that how backpacks are worn can also either help or harm a student's back.

"Try to make sure the backpack doesn't sit more than four inches below the waist," he advised. "What that will do is cause the child to lean forward to compensate which will cause postural problems."

Making sure to wear the straps properly can also alleviate stress on the back. Horen suggests never wearing a backpack on only one shoulder, which can cause imbalance.

"Straps are padded and wide and adjustable because it's all about having a proper fit," Horen said. "What good is having all the proper straps and fit if the child is just going to dangle it off of one shoulder?"

Teeth

They may be a relatively small part of the body, but teeth and gums can have a large impact on overall health.

"Our teeth are a gateway to the health of our bodies," Charles Chiarello, D.D.S., of Dental Associates in Farmington, said.

According to Chiarello, not properly caring for teeth can lead to inflammation caused by bacteria.

"When you brush and floss your teeth properly on a daily basis, that bacteria doesn't have time to stay on your teeth," he said.

Elizabeth Alligood, D.D.S., a private practitioner who practices pediatric dentistry, said that improper oral care can negatively affect a student's education as well.

"Dental disease keeps more kids out of school than any other disease," she said. "They may be out getting fillings done, or they'll be out if they have pain in their gums. Your dental health is very important to get you to be able to concentrate on your school day."

Both dentists agreed that any important way to ensure proper dental health is to proper brush and floss every day.

"We see a lot in our younger patients, especially adolescents, teenagers and up through college, that they aren't brushing as often as they should be," Chiarello said.

Alligood suggested that at a young age, parents continue to monitor their child's brushing habits to ensure a good clean.

"Especially around age 3 or so, children start to think that they can do everything themselves," she said. "Instead of saying to your 7-year-old, 'go brush your teeth,' go with them while they brush their teeth. Kids in general tend not to brush their front teeth as much as their back teeth.

"Also, when it comes to flossing, many kids don't have the dexterity for it," she continued. "You may need to help them out because you want to make sure that kids are doing a good job."

In addition to brushing and flossing routines, both dentists also suggest avoiding foods and beverages that are acidic and high in sugar.

"Energy drinks, sports drinks, diet sodas, all of them have a really high content of acid. It's not just sugar; acid has become a big problem," Chiarello said. "There are so many young people and adults ingesting these kinds of liquids."

Alligood agreed that an increase in children and teens having sports drinks has led to further problems.

"With those sports drinks, people think that they need to

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Back to School

have them," she explained. "If you're out there at football practice for four hours, yes, Gatorade will be a great thing for your body with restoring electrolytes, but if you aren't doing those kinds of rigorous activities, water will be better for your body."

According to pediatric dentist Elizabeth Alligood, "Dental disease keeps more kids out of school than any other disease." So, when the time comes to put those shades away and head back to the classroom, stop by the dentist's office first.

Jaws

The shark in the water may be dangerous, but according to those at Farmington Valley Physical Therapy, improper jaw care can be just as harmful.

Temporomandibular joint dysfunction, or TMJ as it is more commonly known, is a tight and painful feeling in the muscles or joints of the jaw often caused by stress, poor posture, or phone or computer usage, though genetics, arthritis or former jaw injury can also be factors. According to Farmington Valley Physical Therapy, between 3 and 6 percent of the population has symptoms of TMJ and as much of 30 percent of the entire national population can develop symptoms in their lifetime.

Treatment of TMJ can be difficult as there is not one field of healthcare for treating the condition. Patients may be referred to dentists, physical therapists, or even psychologists to help manage the stress causing the problem.

"It's unfortunate that patients sometimes do not get the care they need in a timely fashion," Bogusla Badon, physical therapist and owner of Farmington Valley Physical Therapy, said. "TMJ pain can be treated just like any other physical ailment. I'm not sure that some primary care providers and dentists are aware that physical therapy is even an option for treatment of orofacial pain." **WHL**

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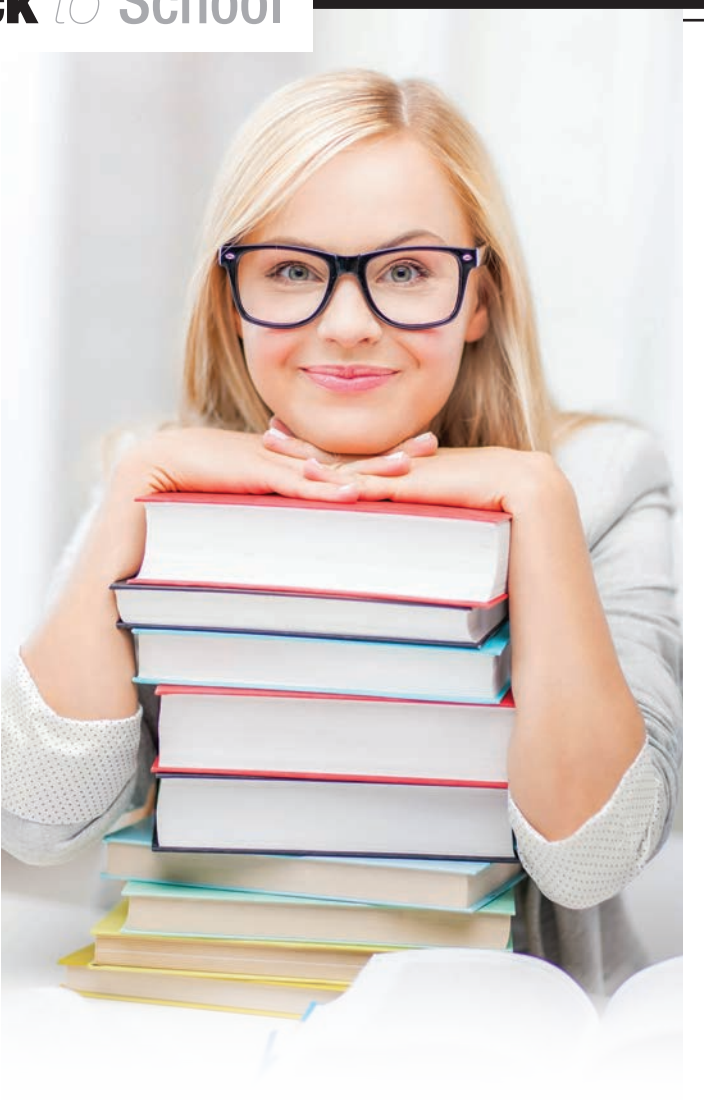

The cost of a college education continues to rise. The College Board says the average cost of tuition and fees for the 2015-2016 school year was $32,405 at private colleges, $9,410 for state residents at public colleges, and $23,893 for out-of-state residents attending public universities.

In 2013 and 2014, the average cost of a year's tuition at a Canadian university was $5,772.

The high cost of education compels many students to find ways to finance their education. For many, that means exploring available scholarships.

Scholarships come in different forms and are usually offered to students as a gift to be put toward college or university costs. Some schools offer scholarships, while other scholarships are sponsored by outside organizations.

Students who meet certain requirements may be eligible for scholarships. While academic or athletic skills are the first criteria associated with scholarships, they are not the only avenues by which students can pursue scholarships. Scholarships may be offered to students of certain ethnic groups; children of employees at particular companies; or to students who live in particular states. Local branches of organizations like the Rotary Club or Kiwanis also may give out scholarships.

To improve one's odds of getting a scholarship, consider the following tips.

• Get involved with the community. Many scholarship sponsors seek individuals who are committed to volunteerism. Plus, volunteering for various groups puts students in the path of information about scholarships from these organizations.

• Use scholarship search engines. Those who search for scholarship sponsors should find plenty of results if they peruse scholarship search engines such as Scholarships.com, CollegeBoard.com and FastWeb.com.

• Check the local newspaper. The coupon section of the Sunday newspaper may feature scholarships, as might the classified section. This is a great resource for finding locally based scholarships.

• Use networking contacts. Students should ask anyone they know if they are aware of any scholarship opportunities. Students who develop a rapport with guidance counselors or the financial aid department at their prospective colleges or universities may learn about scholarship opportunities that are not highly publicized. These people may have the inside track on scholarship information.

• Apply for all available scholarships. Now is not the time for students to become lazy. Students should apply for as any scholarships for which they meet the eligibility requirements.

Scholarships can help students offset the rising costs of a college education. Those who are willing to put in the research, time and effort to apply may find a wealth of scholarship opportunities at their disposal. **WHL**

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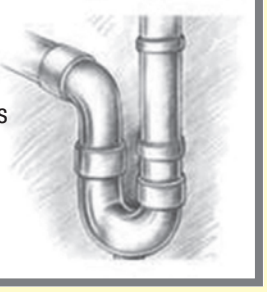

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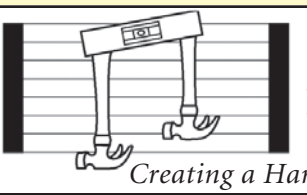

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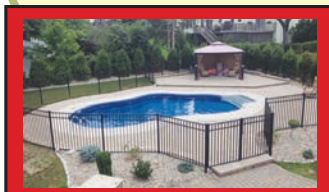

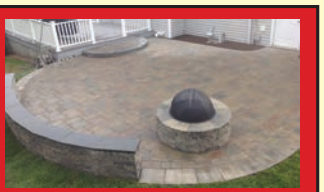

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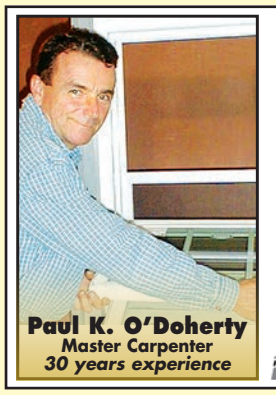

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Guest editorial

Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month

by Allie Rivera
LIFE Staff

Nine years ago, my best friend heard the words that no person ever wants to hear. At age 18, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

I remember distinctly how I found out about the diagnosis. Meg and I were really just starting to get to know each other and I was out to dinner with a mutual friend at our usual spot, Denny's in Westbrook, when he told me she had cancer. Every part of me froze. An 18-year-old being diagnosed with cancer was supposed to be the plot of a tragic movie, not the reality of someone I love.

At the time, I had some knowledge of the thyroid as I have a condition called hypothyroidism, and I still find it incredible how much of a person's life is affected by this relatively small, butterfly-shaped gland. Because my thyroid does not produce enough of the T3 and T4 thyroid hormones, I would experience fatigue, abnormal weight gain, mental fogginess, changes in metabolism, moodiness and depression. As a 20-year-old college student, I knew that I would have to take a synthetic thyroid medication for the rest of my life to combat these symptoms, and, frankly, that was all I needed to know. Pill makes thyroid work. Thyroid makes me work. Carry on with life.

After Meg's diagnosis, I began doing more research into this vital yet oft-neglected part of the body and found out about the wide range of issues that can come from a thyroid that does not function properly.

Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, or Hashimoto's Disease, is an autoimmune disorder in which the body's immune system fights against the thyroid, causing a person's body to swing from an overactive thyroid, or hyperthyroidism, to underactive, causing the body to stop producing the necessary thyroid hormones. Graves' Disease, another autoimmune disorder, typically results in an enlarged thyroid and can cause irritability, muscle weakness, sleeping issues, weight loss and quickened heart rate.

The more I learned about all that the thyroid could do, the more concerned I grew, but eventually I stumbled upon what seemed like good news. In the online cancer community – another thing which I never knew existed before – there was a running idea that if there was one type of cancer you could choose to get, it would be thyroid cancer. It was an idea that was at once =disturbing and encouraging. In typical cases, Meg's and my research told us, thyroid cancer patients have surgery to remove their thyroid then must remain on a high-dose synthetic thyroid medication for the rest of their life. Nothing further.

The idea of surgery is and was still daunting, but Meg is the strongest person I know and has the greatest sense of humor. She went into that surgery and after a few complications came out on the other side ready to take on the world. She started college. She played with her animals. She continued to make those around her smile and laugh on a daily basis. Being a cancer survivor at 18 was an enormous title to take, but she did it all with a strength and class that I never would have been able to show.

Two years later, when it was discovered that the cancer had come back, this time in her lymph nodes, the news was even more devastating than the first time. She texted the news to me, and as I sat in my old Honda Accord outside of a YMCA, I felt a rush of sadness, anger, disbelief and foolishness to think that something like cancer could be just a blip in someone's life.

In the time since that second diagnosis, Meg's cancer has returned three more times. At age 27, she has had five surgeries in her neck, and some of the damage from cutting that area open numerous times will now never recover.

Amazingly, yet not surprising to anyone who knows her, Meg has continued to be as strong, supportive and funny as she always has been. Regardless of how she is, she will go out of her way to ask me how I'm feeling and take care of those around her.

For many, September is a month to look forward. It's the start of a new season, a new school year, and a chance to shake off the heaviness of the summer months. But for me, Meg, and countless others affected by thyroid cancer, it is a time to reflect on what the human spirit can endure. There is no such thing as a "good" kind of cancer. It's a cruel myth that devalues the struggle that those who have survived the disease go through. But there is always the possibility of hope. **WHL**

To learn more about thyroid cancer, visit www.cancer.org/cancer/thyroidcancer.

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RH MASONRY SERVICES, LLC - All masonry from new construction to repairs of walkways, patios, pool decks, chimneys/fireplaces, retaining walls. Brick, stone, veneer, pavers, etc. Licensed and Insured. Free estimates. 860.483.0139 www.rhmasonryct.com

ANDY WOTTON PLUMBING & HEATING, LLC 860-833-8153. We offer honest plumbing at a reasonable price. Estimates are always given before any work is done. From snaking your main drain to water heaters and boilers, faucets and leaky pipes - WE DO IT ALL. Remember with Andy Wotton Plumbing, it's not done until you say it is. Call today 860-833-8153. Licensed and insured P10282605 S1 0402048.

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DAVINO ANTIQUE CLOCKS -Antique Clock Repair - Repair and maintenance service for antique and vintage clocks. House calls available. 860-402-5585 www.davinoclocks.com

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Services

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Gamblers Anonymous

Gamblers Anonymous can help you. Take back your life. Phone: 855-2-CALL-GA 855-222-5542 to speak with someone. Gamblers Anonymous is a non-profit fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem. www.gamblersanonymous.org.

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COLDWELL BANKER
RESIDENTIAL BROKERAGE

AVON – This gracious 4 bedroom colonial in private setting has been redesigned to reflect today's lifestyle. The chef's kitchen is complete with oversized Subzero refrigerator, River White granite, Wolf range, warming drawer, and custom cherry cabinets. $974,900

Mary Rose Sinatro 860.614.4566

WEST HARTFORD – Unique colonial w/many updates including chef's kit, open flow 4-5BRs, 4.5 baths, master suite w/FP, custom indoor pool pavilion & elevator! One-of-a-kind! $699,900

Michael Antisdale 860.803.6560

WEST HARTFORD – Immaculate and well maintained contemporary home in cul-de-sac location. This 3-4 bedroom includes a master suite, vaulted ceiling den and living room both have sliders leading to deck with walk-out finished lower level. Beautifully landscaped adjacent lot is also for sale which has a path to reservoir. $699,900

Joyce Aparicio 860.913.4231

WEST HARTFORD – You'll love all of the space and period details coupled with the chef's kitchen with over sized center island, high end appliances and cherry cabinetry. First floor suite with separate entrance. $625,000

Kara Flanagan 860.796.5532

WEST HARTFORD – This brick colonial has been meticulously cared for. Handsome front to back fire placed living room. White and granite kitchen, stainless appliances, beautiful wood floors, tons of natural light. $639,000

Tracey Hollerbach 860.305.7993

FARMINGTON – Autumn Estates, Farmington's active adult community. Wide open floor plan features 9 ft+ ceilings. Gourmet franite kitchen GE stainless appliances. $625,000

Billie Reese 860.841.2457

WEST HARTFORD – Incredibly spacious colonial. 5BR including master suite & 4 full BA. Family room + year round sunroom, eat-in-kitchen with granite, private pool & patio! 3+ car garage. $539,500

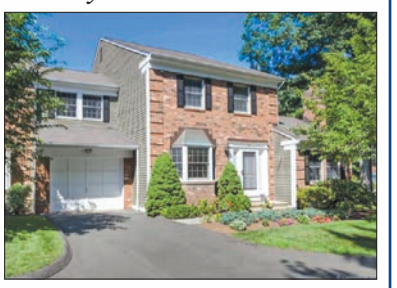
Sherry Rifkin 860.985.6053

WEST HARTFORD – This gracious 1920's colonial in the Morley school district. The sunny, EIK has crisp white cabinets and a new stainless fridge and gas range. $432,500

Kara Flanagan 860.796.5532

BLOOMFIELD – Fantastic location bordering Tumblebrook Golf Course. New stone tiered patio in back. Ease of living w/first floor master & first floor laundry. 2nd floor offers 2 additional bedrooms. $395,900

Billie Reese 860.841.2457



FARMINGTON – Spectacular end unit at Tunxis Village! Spacious 3 bedroom, 2.5 bath townhouse w/open floor plan, renovated kitchen, huge master suite, family room w/ fireplace, one car att gar, full basement. $329,900

Michael Antisdale 860.803.6560

WEST HARTFORD – Immaculate condition inside and out. Brand new stainless appliances. Repainted interior, newly refinished HW floors, upgraded full bath. Private deep backyard with a deck and patio. $329,000

Tracey Hollerbach 860.305.7993

WEST HARTFORD – Well maintained 4 bedroom, 2.1 bath Cape Cod. Enormous master bedroom, finished basement, garage, deck & yard! Walk to Blue Back Square & West Hartford center. $315,000

Joyce Aparicio 860.913.4231

WEST HARTFORD – Beautiful classic Col in a great neighborhood setting. Updated EIK w/Granite. Charming sun porch overlooks landscaped backyard. Four lg bedrooms on the 2nd floor. LL family room w/granite bar. $314,000

Billie Reese 860.841.2457

WEST HARTFORD – Catch the ambiance of this very special 2-bedroom home. Appealing residence providing lovely features. 2 fireplaces. Great additional room is perfect for a third bedroom or in home office! $269,900

Kara Flanagan 860.796.5532

EAST HARTFORD – Fantastic 2-unit property you have been looking for at an affordable price. 2 BR and 1 full BA in each floor with a lg LR. Each unit has access to laundry hook-up and large front porch. Large fenced back yard with 1 car garage and attached shed for great storage. $129,900.

Joyce Aparicio 860.913.4231

WEST HARTFORD – Classic Colonial in great neighborhood. Hardwood under carpeting in living room, dining room, stairs and bedrooms. Finished LL w/great Berber carpet. EIK has been updated w/beautiful maple cabinets. $249,900

Billie Reese 860.841.2457

NEWINGTON – Updated 3BR, 1 bath ranch in popular neighborhood! One level living with new flooring & appliances, fenced yard, patio & 2 car garage. Great for downsizing or condo alternative. $189,900

Michael Antisdale 860.803.6560

HARTFORD – Why rent when you can own? Put 5% down and pay about $1,350 a month! The unit has high ceilings, lots of exposed brick, an open floor plan and is on the top floor. In unit laundry and much more. $124,900

Sean Page 860.966.6761

BRISTOL – Move in ready condo on the Bristol/Southington line. Minutes from 84, Rt. 10, ESPN & Casey Field. Open concept 2BR/1.5BA. Wood fireplace, large back deck. $119,999

Chris Tracy 860.966.9887

AVON – Wonderful apartment complex in Avon. Pool, tennis courts, laundry on each floor. Free heat and hot water! 1BR - $1150, 2BR - $1385 & 3BR - $1620.

Mary Rose Sinatro 860.614.4566

Sylvie Fillion, Mortgage Representative & Senior Loan Officer For Special Financing Opportuinties On Any Of Our Listings, Please Contact Sylvie at 860-570-2520 • NMLS #110720 & CT #5584

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